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MY ONLY LOVE.

A Novel.

BY

EMILIA AYLMER BLAKE,

AUTHOR OF 'A CROWN FOR LOVE,' 'NELSON,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

οὐκ ἴστ' ἐραστης ὅστις οὐκ αἰεί φιλει

EURIPIDES.

'But this was taught me by the dove,
To die—and know no second love.
This lesson yet hath man to learn,
Taught by the thing he dares to spurn:
The bird that sings within the brake,
The swan that swims upon the lake,
One mate, and one alone, will take.'

BYRON.

London:

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MY ONLY LOVE.

CHAPTER I.

EASTWARD HO!

It was strangely sweet to me to tread again the ocean path, which recalled some of the earliest memories of childhood; to live again, as it were, in the life that came back to me, with marvellous distinctness in every detail; like a thing of yesterday, after I had set my feet once more upon that home-land of mine, from whence I had been borne away, a motherless babe, not three years old, now eighteen years ago. I fed and revived upon the rich fruits and glorious flowers, whose delicious scents I

drank in with my breath, thirsting for the deep draught of a passion I had but tasted of, for that life in another's life which was a necessity of my nature, if I were to live at all beneath the Indian sun, now drawing out my latent powers of suffering, enjoying, doing or dying, as surely as it causes the wondrous tropical wealth of flower, tree, bird, and insect to spring up, luxuriant and many-living, from the rich warm earth of that Orient, where, it is said, the race of man first grew into being likewise. Day by day, in our new abode, in unforgotten Calcutta, the trifling circumstances of our Anglo-Indian household struck me as familiar of old: the swarm of servants, the method of meals, and all the manner of life: more slowly, as it were by imperceptible degrees, the soft language of my birth-land came back, at first to my ear only, as an echo without sense; till, as I lived among my mother's people, the first sounds I had been taught in infancy grew less and less strange upon my tongue: but this was not enough for the purpose I had before me: it behoved me to acquire by

diligent study under a native teacher the principal forms of a language which will not come by intuition and spontaneous use, after the morning hours of life have gone by among strangers of another speech.

My first sight of Arthur—for see him I must inevitably, though of design I kept my arrival unrecorded, when Lady Cameron's advent was heralded with full flourish of editorial trumpets in the Calcutta press—my first sight of him was in such wise as made me feel in all its bitterness the separation that was between us wider and more impassable than ever, while in bodily presence we were close enough, almost, for me to have touched some inanimate object consecrated by contact with his hand, to have set my foot upon the ground lately hallowed by his tread. I was watching from a verandah, where I knew he would pass by on some high duty of his office; I hid my face, gazing only from beneath a screen of feathers, cloaked and veiled beyond the possibility of recognition: I marked him as he rode by,

royally attended, with proud defiance on his brow, and on his mouth the set determination to endure to the bitter end. I read the looks of the men who followed him, all obedient until death to their commander, whatever the orders or the man himself might be; I noted all, and was conscious of the great stain that was upon him, to blur his very honor as a soldier and a gentleman; I could understand how sternly he would hold himself aloof, as an attainted man, from every communication with such as had known and loved him in the past, in the beauty and purity of his fame.

How my heart was borne out to him in passionate pity! how my great love grew to him the stronger beneath the shadow of defeat and shame! A crime had been committed, and a trial was impending, as to the cause of General Hope Trevor's death; upon the issue might hang such suspicions as, failing direct proof against the true criminal, might brand the greatest name in England's contemporary history with the whole infamy of a foul and

treacherous murder. The general expectation pointed to Arthur's disgrace; such punishment as moral England is known to inflict now and then upon some chosen scapegoat, some man of mark by illustrious achievement rather than any conspicuous sinner against the world's indefinable code of conscience. Thus the proud eminence he had made such sacrifice to reach, both of my true deep love and his own life's happiness, was now as a ground of hot lava and crumbling ashes, ready to fall away beneath his feet.

I must disguise much of the events I have to relate, by suppression of details tending to identify the chief actors in a drama still recent—I would not willingly wound any bosom by betrayal of the secret springs of action wherein I bore so feeling a part. Still farther be it from me to disturb the sacred mould scarce green as yet above the grave where I have buried my own heart. Under this reserve, I proceed upon the narrative of such circumstances as must explain my tale.

Some time after General Hope Trevor

returned to India with his wife, he was charged with a mission of extreme difficulty and delicacy, to come to a diplomatic understanding with one of the most noted Indian Princes, a Maharajah of great possessions and influence, which had been thrown into the scale rather against than for us, during the crucial days of the Mutiny, but who, since victory had inclined in our favor, chose at least to seem as it were upon our side. It was vital to our interests that this powerful chief should leave no uncertainty amongst his fellow princes, or subject nobles, as to the line of conduct his policy, if not inclination, imposed upon him; and to bend his wavering faith in the direction of honest support of the British rule was the somewhat herculean labour laid upon Sir John's shoulders. Having to travel several hundred miles through provinces still hot with recently quenched rebellion, he chose to leave his lady in safety at Calcutta, and proceed upon his daring embassy with no European female in his train.

The negotiation proved arduous, yet not unpromising of ultimate success, much time and patience being indispensable conditions to the treaty; the prolonged presence of the British general in itself kept the irresolute Maharajah in awe of our power. During this residence, rather than mission extraordinary, of her husband at the court of the Indian Prince, Lady Diana's movements afforded subject for much remark and animadversion by Calcutta gossips, as well as matter for press paragraphs, in the peculiar sweet and bitter tone adopted by such critics as possess the malice, but not quite the impudence, of professed censors of that upper class, which by courtesy of the lower races is presumed to be impeccable. Very rare meetings, even in public, between her and Arthur, could be imputed to either as lapses from strict propriety; harder still it seemed to blame her directly for the separation from her husband, absent on his duty, while even delicacy forbade an English lady from venturing herself in the

midst of a country defiled by every hideous tale of outrage and shame, the birth of diseased imaginations and that depraved love of the horrible, which in those days had grown a ruling mania in the Anglo-Indian mind. Rumor and slanderous fear had added impossible crime to the actual tale of guilt which lay, grievous enough, to my countrymen's charge; there could be no doubt of the ghastly realities of havoc and slaughter let loose, which had spared no age nor sex, virgin nor wife, sucking babe nor mother.

Nevertheless, such reports were proclaimed upon the housetop as ought never even to have been whispered concerning a lady nobly born, and married to a British commander. For the first time in his life Sir John Hope Trevor was known to show a coolness in his correspondence with Arthur, which, at the present juncture, was singularly ill-timed, whether on public or private grounds. Hot upon this followed a peremptory summons to his lady to join him at his post.

It need hardly be said this created a prodigious sensation, and food for talk of every kind; the precautions required for the lady's safety, which it was Arthur's business to look to, the stir and circumstance of such a movement, were topics to be commented upon in every household from Cashmere to Cape Comorin. After the lady's rejoining her liege lord, he appeared to labor under some special disadvantage in his dealing with the recalcitrant Maharajah; his temper, it was hinted in various quarters, fitted him rather for a man of action in the field than a peaceful envoy; his bungling in diplomacy could only irritate and alienate, when conciliation would best have served the interests of his country; in a word, there was supposed to be bad blood between him and the Maharajah. Most unfortunately, in the heat and very fury of the controversy, Sir John fell seriously ill.

He had never been laid up before, except once with a severe wound, during

his long career of Indian service, and again, for a few days only, with similar symptoms, but lighter than the present, some months previously. His health, proverbially superior to that of most men ten or fifteen years his juniors, now suddenly broke down with a wasting disease, for which no accountable cause could be discovered by the medical skill available. 'Poison' was whispered from mouth to mouth like the password of a conspiracy, amongst the troops of servants, attendants, and officials, until at last, as Sir John grew worse, the ugly-sounding phrase came to be repeated in his lady's boudoir. She, taking alarm at once, urged immediate departure from the Maharajah's court, which proposal was repeated after her in somewhat undiplomatic fashion, with much rupture of red tape, and consequent evil results to the object of the mission. This was considered, on the whole, a failure; some kind of terms of treaty were arranged, but not concluded, when the negotiation was interrupted by Sir John's untoward illness,

so that upon his partial recovery the business had to be patched up amidst the hurry of preparation for taking hasty leave, to the detriment of British interests.

Great was the hubbub aroused in critical Calcutta by the quasi defeat of the gallant general in the diplomatic field, and exceedingly invidious the comparisons drawn between him and Arthur, most galling to the elder officer, who had served so long as a ladder to push the other to high eminence above himself. To accomplish this hitherto seemed with both husband and wife a common desire. Now that Sir John, for the first time in his life, was voted an unsuccessful man, it might well be that he felt sore upon the point; out of political jealousy may have grown a bitter personal feeling of the like nature, fed and fanned by daily provocation of fabricators of false news, who went the length of hinting in certain journals that the gallant general, whose health was so liable to disturbance by change of climate, had in reality passed the fit age for the service required at the

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Maharajah's court, where he had only succeeded in discovering a mare's nest, being now on the eve of his return to Calcutta, restored to excellent health for his advanced years.

No wonder that, being thus goaded, his temper grew worse in an inverse ratio with his physical improvement. Suspicious utterances dropped by him in unguarded moments were soon twisted into declarations adverse to his lady, and injurious to his own honor as her husband. Much of the same kind had been said of her freely for years past, by hundreds, perhaps thousands, but hitherto, not one word by him who was chiefly concerned. Truly, the character of man, or even woman, can stand much rude handling and still prosper in the world's eye, provided only the husband or wife aggrieved chooses to see nothing. But that one bosom foe set against man or woman brings ruin to either, be the accusation true or false; the guilty or the innocent equally suffer, once 'all the world and his wife,' or 'all the world

and her husband,' agree to fix upon a partner's forehead the ineffaceable stigma of shame.

Lady Diana's position must have become intolerable to her proud, wilful spirit, pent in that 'house divided against itself,' with one who believed her more guilty even than she perhaps deserved to be believed. The pair seldom met except on public occasions, when their cold politeness was remarked, and it was more than once insinuated in the malicious prints which helped to make her life odious to her, that she would not continue long in her present position, such hints being supplemented by notes and comments amongst her own private circle, to the effect that a divorce or separation was on the *tapis* between her and her injured lord.

Very opportunely for her he died suddenly one night, after a few hours' illness; too opportunely, it appeared, for a searching inquiry followed hard upon the sudden death; it was proved that poison was the cause—as to the manner, doctors differed

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much, the Indian methods of murder baffling European medical practice. Native doctors were called into council, and ultimately a commission appointed to try Sir John's native servants, with every possibility of involving the Maharajah in a charge of complicity; and perhaps some others, not mentioned in the preliminary indictment. The commission was composed half of English, half of Indian celebrities; one of these latter, as I learned, a brother of my mother, my uncle, whom I had never seen, now sitting in judgment, and it might be in condemnation, upon acts closely touching, perhaps, the man I loved.

All these circumstances I heard, or gathered from what I heard, within the first month after my arrival in Calcutta; along with them I put together, side by side, Lady Diana's disjointed revelations to me before I left England; I bore specially in mind her wild story of the favourite ayah's flight on the same night that her husband so strangely died; there came also to my

recollection another story, which some time in my life had been repeated in my hearing; it was of a young girl who made a favourite of a cat, and the animal, usually as affectionate as a pet dog, on one occasion turned upon her, scratched her neck until she fainted, and was found lying on the floor. For years afterwards she was a victim to hysterical and epileptic fits, and the cat supposed to have caused the injury disappeared, and was never seen afterwards.

These two stories worked upon my mind until they connected themselves together, and I grasped at both, as it were the commencement out of which a clue was to be wound into the labyrinth of fate.

CHAPTER II.

BLOOD THICKER THAN WATER.

JWALA SINGH—so was my kinsman named—held high authority as a native judge, being also a Brahmin of the most exclusive caste and strictest dogma, borne out by rigid purity of life. No woman living shared or softened this austerity; he had had a wife, and once a child, a son who, having deeply offended him in youth, found no place for late repentance in the heart of his hard father. Such by common report was the judge I had to propitiate, if that could be; a man whom neither fear nor favor might turn aside one jot from his conviction or prejudice.

Would he look with some kindness upon

my face, so like my mother's when last he looked on her, a brief year before her untimely death? Against her brother's will she married, 'lost caste' by her European alliance, was cut off for ever from her kindred, and, thus estranged, she died. Should I, her living fault, find mercy of such a meter of stern measure to poor human weakness? I had but to try.

I wrote him, conveying my letter through an official channel, so that he might be assured no deception was practised as to my identity. Coldly consenting to my prayer for recognition, he said if I desired to see him I might come. I did so, with great difficulty leaving Lady Cameron behind, who wanted to make a third in our conference.

A respectable procession of bearers and female attendants surrounded my palanquin with due mystery and circumstance, as became a maiden of condition and semi-oriental parentage, having respect to the dignity of the stranger she visited for the first time, although so near of kin.

He received me with cold kindness, while I took in a rapid glance the measure of his qualities. Like Runjeet Singh, the fierce old warrior 'Lion of Lahore,' he was a small man of spare proportions, not much taller than myself, with the eagle eye of our race, searching my spirit through. If there were any tender spot in that nature, it lay hid so far beneath the surface that I might not discern it in this our first formal interview. He looked at me intently, not unfavorably, yet holding me aloof, so as to prohibit all show of emotion on my side. Gathering up all my resolution, I questioned him.

'Should you have known me as your sister's child, though I am not beautiful like my mother?'

'Not beautiful like her to tempt the eye of the stranger, yet I am glad to find neither your features nor your tongue have lost the traces of birth and blood. These cannot be washed off by the great black water, although the child of Brahma passing that defiles her caste for ever.'

This sounded harsher than rebuke, while

imputing no blame personally to me; there was humiliation in the very excuse, exempting me from my mother's sin; as to beauty, I was without honor in the house of my kindred—why, therefore, should I dare complain for despised love? Crushing down my heart, I made answer:

'It may be for the best that God made me as I am. I wished to speak to you of a woman I have known, whose beauty has been a snare to her soul. One you must hear much of in the great trial coming on.'

'Mean you the wife of the murdered Feringhee Sirdar? Yes, we shall see her here; she has been summoned back from England to give her evidence before the court, and is now upon the sea: if we could compel her to speak what she has known, we should bring the hidden truth to light. But your English laws suffer us not to use the surest means.'

'What means?' I gasped out shuddering.

'The slow effect of imprisonment, hunger, and if these be insufficient, sharper

pains. It is thus that the guilty should be questioned of their evil deeds.'

'How do you know she is guilty before you have tried the cause?'

'How can a woman be innocent whose husband has died in such strange manner, and left recorded in his will the very names of the persons who had interest in his death, as this unhappy Englishman has done?'

'What will? I never heard of it.'

'No, that you might not; it was kept secret for months, but I have read the provisions which give the widow all her husband's goods for her life, unless she should marry the great man who was suspected by that husband—you know him whom I mean; he is too mighty to be named in such a cause.'

I did know too well. Arthur's name burst from my lips, together with the wild question:

'And should they marry?'

'She would forfeit all except her dower; but that is the least part of her penalty,

they dare not, they will not incur it; come what may, those two are parted for ever.'

A great sigh relieved my heart, as I said:

'That is well—yet I believe her guiltless of the murder.'

'Murder or adultery, it matters not so much when a guilty woman has gone so far.'

'It may be that it is not so. Sir John Hope Trevor had suspicions only; the very conditions of his will acquit her of actual guilt in his eyes—should not the doubt tell in her favor?'

'These are the notions of your land; we suffer not such conduct amongst our women.'

'But for the sake of the man who holds such high authority and sway over the fate of millions—for the honor of my father's race—I would search and find out the truth; I see a clue to that end, if only you will help me.'

'What can you know? surely nothing.'

'Only what this unhappy woman told me herself.'

'She is a friend of yours?'

'No; rather my bitterest enemy—but even to such I have been taught we owe mercy—justice at least—when wrongfully arraigned.'

'These are the nobler doctrines of your faith, not alien from the divine teaching of Brahma, but seldom do you practise them against your evil passions. Well, what did this woman tell you?'

'That during the night of Sir John's death, her favourite ayah, the sharer of her bosom secrets, fled or disappeared, in the very moment friendly help was most needed—left her alone to face the horror of her husband's violent death—was it suicide or murder we know not; but the poison was of such cunning nature that none of our physicians could explain its effects. Surely that ayah who deserted her mistress knew more than she would tell of her own will—all that we desire to prove—if we could but discover her!'

'That might be—and therefore you would have me seek and find her who never will unveil her face to the light of the sun, nor her soul to the eyes of man, if this tale of your fancy be true. No; justice cannot halt upon such stumbling-blocks as these; enough, if we can discover the master criminal, and let the slave go free.'

The lines of his mouth grew hard with a determination against me, such as I never saw expressed on a human countenance; it was certain he despised and would reject such evidence as I sought; still, I importuned on.

'You do not say you would not listen and inquire into the truth, no matter what the source from whence that could be traced? If I found the woman you would question her? Will you not stay your judgment until I try?'

'No; what's the good? Your Feringhee laws permit no effectual questioning; the woman would tell us every falsehood she could invent to justify herself and her mis-

tress, even could we find her out—but that is impossible.'

'Nothing is impossible to one resolved like me—I would give my very life to find her, and save'—my voice was choked in my throat, and I gave not utterance to Arthur's name.

'You would give your life to save another, a woman who, you have said, hates you? This is unnatural, or else some madness, some enchantment has come upon you.'

Such a thought was too repulsive to my feelings. 'No, no,' I cried; 'I render her back hate for hate, with more than mortal abhorring; no, not for her would I give my life, but for him, my father's dearest friend, the noblest man in England or India—for his sake, for him alone'—I broke down helpless.

'Why do you speak so of him? Why is the woman your enemy? Is he your lover? Answer me the truth.'

I was silent as the dead.

'Has he spoken to you of love? Answer me.'

I could not deny it—'He did speak so once.'

'Will he make you his wife?'

I could not say that—I bowed down my head ashamed.

'Girl, are you so lost as to offer him what he will not take with honor, the flower of your life to be plucked and cast away, trodden down in the mire of infamy, the pollution abhorred of the very pariah dog, to make yourself a Feringhee's——'

'Speak no shameful word of my mother's daughter; remember I have no kindred to protect me or avenge my wrong, and spare me that word of outrage yourself must bitterly repent; if I do love Arthur, he is noble and deserves the noblest love; I can serve him in silence, and suffer till I die.'

There was a twitching of the rigid muscles of that face, a softening of eye and brow as he faltered: 'Yes, yes—to hear you speak I should have known you as my sister's child—you have your mother's voice, my maiden.'

'Have I indeed? then, trust me, I have her heart.' I looked to him to whom my mother before I was born might have pleaded and supplicated, as I did now, and all in vain; humbling herself for the sake of another, dearer than her own life, only to be cast off and rejected until death! It might be that he repented now, and would make me amends for the dead unpardoned; it might be—I pressed and urged him till he cut off my words with: 'What would you have me do?'

'Advise me, guide me, tell me at least how and where I should pursue my search after this woman who has fled, hiding her crime, perhaps, in some zenana of your princes, in some temple of your gods; could not some spy be found to track her out? Or I myself will go.'

'Dream not of such a thing. No, I will satisfy you, as far as may be: you have heard I had once a son.'

'I have heard so—I was warned not to utter his name in your hearing.'

'They were prudent who gave that

caution; nevertheless, I have not left Nazir Jung to want the bread we throw to dogs. An outcast such as he, a wanderer through the land, hears and knows much; such stray sheep are apt to flock together; he might have met the woman in some remote by-way. He shall be sent to you, and you shall give him her description, such as she was with her mistress; he shall discover, if he can, what has become of her since then.'

'And till he does, you will suspend judgment on the trial?'

'I will not; no, nor should any court of justice listen to such a story—unless, before the sentence is passed you have the fact in your hand.'

'I may do so——'

'There is no truth, reasonably, to be expected from such a source, although I do this thing at your demand; I would deal justly with all, and it shall not be said I refused to clear the Feringhee whom the gods have suffered to rule our land, from such dishonor as would be worse than

death to a child of Brahma. Yes, I have known a sepoy of high caste to cut his own throat, driven to despair by a charge of theft he could not disprove; too late it was discovered that the stolen goods had been placed in his tent through the malice of a servant, who then urged the accusation against him; yet what was this to the imputation of having robbed a comrade of his wife and life? Yes, let the great chief be justified if it please the supreme God—I do not believe that can be.'

'You do not believe my assurance, my oath by all that is sacred in heaven and upon earth, that Arthur could not——'

'I believe you think what you speak in all sincerity of purpose, and therefore be content: I shall not see you again until this trial is concluded; it will be best so.'

'You forgive me what I have done?'

'There are things we cannot forgive, even to the third generation; you have done nothing, your birth and breeding—the gods forbid I should cast them up against you as faults! but beware of the

future; your affection to this Feringhee chief I pity while I condemn; your customs are evil and dangerous—we do not allow such liberty to woman. He who was my son shall be sent to you, as I have said; do not you come to me again.'

His eye searched me through and through; yet beneath all his stern severity I discerned some touch of human kindness to which he would not yield consent, and so he dismissed me coldly; there was no more to be said or done with him.

His word was sacredly kept, and a few days afterwards I saw his son; this unhappy offender against paternal law gave proof how heavily the punishment can be meted out according to the strength of the tie of kindred broken, rather than according to the offence committed in itself. Nazir Jung's first crime, I gathered, was a marriage against his father's will, with a maiden of inferior caste, polluting the purity of descent, more valued by the Brahmin than all earthly ties of affection and love; this had led to the youth's

disastrous career; having no longer any self-esteem to lose or to keep, once cast out and disowned by his father, to starve he had not been suffered, but was made to feel every hour of his life how bitter must be the bread of dependence. Hence, I too could bear home the conviction, if needs were, how little such a father and such a judge could be swayed by importunities of mine.

Not many words passed between me and the luckless Nazir Jung: all that could be was understood through mutual pity that drew us together; all we could discover, by inquiries on both sides, as to the missing ayah, we conveyed to each other; it was little more than the fact of her high favor with her mistress, and the suspicions of her rivals in the lady's favor that she had once been a Nautch girl, or some such disreputable vagrant: she went by the name of Ouda, which they said was not her own; but better than all these vague indications, Nazir Jung professed to have seen her more than once during her

service with Lady Diana. He believed she might live concealed within the precincts of some temple, under cover of the sacred duties of the shrine; he would watch, he said, at the great religious festivals, where, it might be, she would at some time appear.

This was but the shadow of a hope, yet I grasped at it, bidding Nazir God-speed upon his search, with help of all the gold I could command. Unless success should crown that enterprise, what profit was there in money, ay, or in my life to me?

CHAPTER III.

JUSTICE WITHOUT MERCY.

It was early in the cold season, towards mid-November, that the Commission met to inquire into the cause of Sir John Hope Trevor's death; being assembled more than half a year after the event, weighted with every heavy ballast of the law, impeded by every entanglement of red tape that use and custom could lay to cross and thwart the even course of justice. The case was much complicated by the native element introduced amongst the judges; by one at least, I knew, so far as her interest could be involved in the trial, Lady Diana was condemned already.

The issue before the Court was,

nominally, the guilt or innocence of two native servants, who, during the last year of his life, had been in close attendance on the unfortunate Sir John; but the true bearing of the case was to bring home a charge of instigation or complicity to the wife of the murdered man, and his nearest friend and most illustrious colleague, Arthur. As the case grew out of the evidence brought forward, several other possibilities appeared, to scatter the risk of condemnation amongst various parties, leaving so many channels open to the escape of the true culprits, whosoever these might be. First came the English valet and cook; both gave testimony criminatory to several parties of Indian nationality, besides the accused. According to the two European domestics, there was a constant going and coming between the native servants of Sir John and certain attendants of the Maharajah's Court; presents of fruit and various summer drinks were frequently conveyed into the General's residence; it was proved that

shortly before he took ill, a glass of sherbet of suspicious origin had been seen, half emptied, on a table near his bed, which glass, with its remaining contents, disappeared before the arrival of medical aid; a week previously, a servant of the Maharajah's, named Nadri, had been heard to say that the stipulations between his master and the British envoy were the smallest part of that Prince's political engagements, as the General would not be alive in another month to call his authority to account.

All this went to enforce the impression that native treachery alone was to blame, the chief criminal's guilt being screened by that of inferior instruments. Adverse to this conclusion, came the depositions of several dependants of the Maharajah, promptly given up by that Prince at the first demand of the British Government. These, in the first place, spoke boldly for their master, denied having received any bribes, either from him or any other, to convey anything injurious to health or life

into Sir John's household: the fruits and sherbets had been brought by them, in several instances, into Lady Diana's boudoir, when Sir John was said to be too busy to receive them, and on these occasions, and at other times, the ayah named Ouda was in constant attendance upon her mistress, and went in and out on messages to Sir John's exclusive chamber; all other attendants, native and European, being strictly forbidden to disturb his privacy uncalled. All this evidence pointed in substance towards Ouda as the actual criminal, and it told with more effect from her countrymen, as those who best might know of what she could be capable. Through her, suspicion tended towards her mistress, as the ayah could have no accountable motive otherwise, and a close confidence, not to say affection, was admitted to have existed between the lady and her servant; but the charge was yet unspoken, though too plainly understood.

Nadri was called to confirm or explain away his words, sworn to on oath by the

European servants: being questioned, he gave an ambiguous denial to the plain sense put upon them. He had referred to the probable departure of Sir John from the Maharajah's court, in consequence of his lady's dislike to that situation, and of important duties likely to recall the General to the British territory; he had never meant to convey the probability of his death, and expressed much indignation at the suspicions thrown upon his master's followers. What had the Maharajah or his people to gain by the murder of a friendly envoy?

A theory of suicide was put forward, as it were in Lady Diana's interest, and evidence was tendered with much reluctance on her behalf, to show motives for such an act. It was pleaded with every 'precaution oratorical' and delicacy of expression, that there were unhappy domestic differences, without just cause, which for some months had divided the couple, in spirit, if not openly before the world. Lady Diana had come from England ex-

pressly to tender her evidence to the Commission, and before she appeared, two different wills made by Sir John, at three months' interval, would be read in Court, also the evidence of a Swiss waiting-maid was forthcoming.

Such documents and depositions, it might be presumed, were produced in order to remove any prejudice that might stand in the way of a dispassionate hearing by the Court of Lady Diana's testimony : they were so unfortunate as to produce a directly opposite effect, to the detriment of the witness. The first will was signed and dated six months before Sir John's death ; it bequeathed to his lady the whole of his property without reserve, excepting only the contingency of her marriage to Arthur, scandalously named and pointed out by the still living husband : if she should marry him, all benefit under that husband's will was forfeited, and her small dowry only remained secured to her for life out of his estate. This will, properly signed and attested, would still hold good.

The second will, dated one month only previous to the testator's decease, was left unsigned: it gave Lady Diana a life interest in the whole of the estate, with remainder to the nephew of Sir John, who would inherit the Baronetcy; no scandalous provisions were contained in this document, and it was advanced that such a will was far more favorable to the lady's interest, as well as good name, than the former one: Sir John, after he was taken ill, had called for this will to be brought to him, no doubt for signature, which he knew it wanted; his lady had refused to disturb his last moments with such concerns, in the confusion of her grief and anxiety; but another interpretation was also put, that she knew of the first will in her favor, but being ignorant of the penal clause attached, preferred that its dispositions should remain intact, and fearing lest a later will might cut her off the inheritance, took care that Sir John should die leaving it unsigned.

The Swiss maid, being called on her

mistress's behalf, took a tone deprecating and apologetic, praying that she might not be required to answer questions touching her mistress's conduct, with such emphasis as conveyed the sense 'much to hide,' beneath her show of insolent respect. Being sworn, with much fussification, she admitted her own name to be Victorine Courvoisier: she had engaged herself in London as 'femme de chambre' to my lady, to accompany her to India in that quality, her duties including the making of her robes and coiffure; these were all the attendance required of her, since the Indian domestic, Ouda, was taken in affection by my lady; indeed, herself was scarcely suffered afterwards in her ladyship's room, and was no longer in any of her confidence; whatever she could not help to overhear, it was not in her duties to repeat.

Being called to book, however, she did repeat long conversations, which the custom of open doors and sitting in verandahs made audible to her, as she went from one part of the house to another, or sat at work

under the trees in the garden. Most of these colloquies were between Ouda and her mistress, in disparagement of the latter's husband, or glorification of her friend, Arthur; some of them carried on in whispers, of which only a broken sense could be made, relating to the nursing and attendance required by Sir John in his strange malady, which first took him soon after his arrival in India. 'But,' added deponent, 'I could never understand what they did mean, and I have no right to say nosing.' After all, when she had told everything she could, including quasi compromising accounts of the occasional visits of Arthur himself, at which times my lady's doors were closed for hours to any other visitors, the whole head and front of the abigail's evidence bore very indirectly on the main point at issue, while it called forth the rebuke of one of the judges, an English gentleman, who pointed out the habit of observing small circumstances which had evidently grown upon the waiting-maid, and the readiness of speech in bringing

them forward, in the sequence most tending to the injury of her mistress; much irrelevant matter, he considered, had been brought in, of the nature of gossip rather than evidence; no one's character would be safe, if an undue intimacy between parties in so high a position could be argued upon such grounds. For himself, he trusted the time would never come when an English lady and gentleman could not meet for lunch or friendly conversation without a witness present to secure them from calumny. Whether they had been altogether prudent, as to guarding themselves against appearances or possible misconstruction, was beside the case at present before the court, and he should be very sorry to be called upon to give an opinion thereon.

This high judicial stricture was elicited during a pause in the proceedings, previous to the anticipated entrance of the witness, whose part, of all concerned in that great trial, was the most arduous to play, and consequently the most attractive to the

general crowd of spectators, whose interest consists merely in looking on at the true and real agony of a fellow-creature, so much more effective in stirring the sleepy public of everyday people in an indifferent world, than the most artistic representation of tragic passion ever can be.

In seeming with the rest, in earnest for my own particular cause of life and death, I too was there to gaze upon that woman, and hang with tingling ears upon every word, as it was dragged out of her lips in anguish and shame; not to rejoice over her humiliation, involving as it must the man I loved; praying rather for her deliverance from such a charge as her worst enemy could not desire to see brought home to her, for common womanhood. Lady Cameron was my companion on this occasion, the interest of the show being sufficiently intense to induce the risk of her ponderous bulk and short breath in the vulgar crowd and Black-Hole-of-Calcutta atmosphere of the court, where no seat more luxurious or reserved could be ob-

tained by pushing and squeezing than a narrow wooden form, on which I contrived to leave her the end seat, so that, resting on a small basis of support, she could safely over-carry her fair fat person and voluminous belongings into space unsupported, so far as the close packed auditors permitted, by whose pressure she was secured from toppling over her balance of ambition to an ignominious fall 'o' th' other side.'

Lady Diana was impolitic enough to keep the Court waiting an unconscionable length of time, with the same fine ladylike unpunctuality that marked her theatrical performances, and was wont to keep the stage waiting until all her possible and impossible shortcomings were freely discussed by the audience. The same result followed now, in sharper fashion, as a real tragedy excels an acted one. Neither was my companion the last or the least loud in her disposition to back-bite — much to my horror, for I shuddered with dread of my enforced silence at her remarks being inter-

preted into assent, and the whole repeated as our joint conversation to Arthur, by some officious friend of neither party. Lady Cameron, with the rest of the world, had changed her front since 'poor Sir John' had disarmed by dying the malice of the same; on '*de mortuis nihil nisi bonum*' principle, he was exonerated from the charge of having contributed, by wilful and criminal closing of his eyes, to his wife's alleged dishonor; for both him and herself, his widow was left now to bear the double 'bad blame' of all accusers. Nevertheless, on her appearing, at last, after silence enforced in the Court under pain of exclusion from the feast of delicious disgusts anticipated, she was received by the European judges with civility at least, not unmingled with a touch of pity for the woman, guilty or not guilty, as if no effect at all could be produced on their unbiased minds by any evidence whatever, until the other side of the question had been sifted, with all legal acumen, to the bottom. But among the native element in the Commis-

sion, it was too plain what judgment had been already pronounced against this European widow of a murdered husband, who was so obstinate in desire to survive her lord, and hold her own without him in the drama of life. There, harder and colder than the rest, sat my kinsman, Jwala Singh, immutable in his conviction, like the graven image of an Indian god, set up in pitiless judgment upon the poor erring flesh and blood crushed defenceless beneath the gory wheels of his car. I felt my veins congeal, my nerves contract to frigid helplessness, as my eyes were riveted to that brow of stone.

She stood before the judges, looking neither to the right nor to the left, her back to the crowd and her veil down, to baulk as far as she might the vulgar curiosity of the gazers there; she spoke no word, save in answer to the questions, which drew out by the torture of a moral rack avowals from her of almost all a woman most desires to conceal. One by one, the veils and coverings of her soul

were torn away, until she stood naked to the inmost core of her heart, exposed to the open view of day by the horrible vivi-section practised in form of law upon a human being. As far as I can recollect, I will repeat the tale, which overcame me so much in the hearing that I was borne from that judgment chamber in case more pitiable than the chief sufferer herself, feeling the very life crushed out of my body, and rather fit to be borne to rest with the dead than to move again among those that live.

Seating herself, on the courteous motion of the judge whose voice had already been heard in her behalf, her thick widow's veil still down, she proceeded to give a clear and circumstantial account of her husband's last illness, ending in his death. Sleeping alone, she was roused in the middle of the night by Sir John's English valet, calling out at her door that his master was taken sick, and in great agony.

'I rushed to the ante-room,' she pursued, 'where my personal attendant,

Ouda, the Indian ayah, used to sleep, calling her repeatedly to rise and come with me to Sir John's room.'

'You felt reluctant to go to your husband alone?'

'I did; fearing he might have a fit, such as attacked him nearly a year before, when he seemed not accountable for his actions; he was very violent at that time.'

'Nearly a year before? and Ouda was then in your service?'

'She was; and foretold the course of his illness, which turned out as she said. I had a certain confidence in her skill and knowledge of diseases incident to her native climate; I called to her, in my alarm, for help—there was no answer, she was never seen again.'

'You know nothing of the cause or manner of her disappearance?'

'Nothing at all; she could always come and go as she chose in my house. When she could not be found, I sent for my maid Victorine; she attended with me by Sir John's bedside until the doctors came.'

'You did not send for medical aid at the first?'

'I was not called till Sir John had been suffering for two hours—I was not aware of it; time was lost through Ouda's disappearance, and the delay in getting up my maid. I did not know what to do, until I saw my husband's state; then I could not leave him, nor could either of the attendants. I did give the order that the doctor should be brought, but in the confusion of so many servants I could with difficulty put it upon any one of them to go.'

'Did you tell the doctors what was the cause, in your belief, of Sir John's sufferings?'

'I did not; I did apprehend poison, taken by his own hand, and dreaded to expose the disgrace of his having attempted suicide. I never imagined for a moment that his life could be in danger from any around him; whatever he had done himself, I left him to explain to the doctor as a matter of right. I quitted the room, to

give the opportunity: I never knew what passed between the surgeons and the dying, until all was over.'

'You know now that Sir John denied having taken anything but laudanum to still his pain. Do you still adhere to your belief in his suicide?'

'I do—I cannot otherwise account for the manner of his death.'

'Can you assign any motive for such an act?'

'I am unwilling to speak of them, but if I must—disappointments, very sore to an officer so old in the service; the failure of his mission to the Maharajah was the final blow to him.'

'But he had other grievances before?'

'I fear so; he saw the man he had been first to raise from obscurity pass above him, while his own great services were depreciated and slighted by his country. This preyed upon his mind, and cooled the old friendship between him and Arthur —though I knew he felt the loss of the intimacy, I strove to renew it in vain; he

even blamed me for doing so, and altogether, I do not consider him accountable for what he did. More than one great man has quitted this scene of your Indian Empire, by suicide or broken heart, since the days of Clive, who first set the example.'

'Is this your conclusion, then, as to the glass of sherbet, which disappeared along with your ayah?'

'I tasted it myself, before she brought it to Sir John's room that night; he would have it always by his bed-side, in case of waking in the heat of the night; I know no more.'

'Was there not a will, which he desired to sign before he died?'

'There was——'

'Why was he prevented from so doing?'

'I feared it would disturb his last moments.'

'What! though he called for the will to sign?'

'I knew not what to do: I was ignorant

of the tenor of both wills, that which was signed as well as the last invalid document; for my own sake, I desired to obey his wishes. I cannot remember what I did during those awful hours—the sight of his agony was distracting me: I cannot recall it now, and keep my senses about me.'

Evidently overcome, she was permitted to retire for a few minutes, while a claim was put in by the native Commissioners to question her themselves through the interpreter. Jwala Singh undertook the interrogatory for the rest, after a whispered debate among the judges. From the manner of his dealing with her, it seemed to me he cherished some special, hidden hate against her, embittered, perhaps, by information through some secret channel from Ouda to his son, and thence to him. For my conviction was unshaken that through that woman the catastrophe had come to her master's life and her mistress's name and fame. Whatever my own sense of wrong might be from Lady Diana as a rival, it was a cruel sight to look upon an

Englishwoman baited almost to death by the cunning and subtle questioning of this biased judge—my kinsman though he were.

Through all her life's history, he drove her back, year by year, from the hour of her husband's death to her mercenary marriage, when she sold her beauty for rank and wealth, having first loved another man.

Back she fell from date to date, in horrible moments, like those of a body flung from a precipice, dashed from rock to rock on sharp points of lacerating memory: moments brief in time, yet long enough, it has been said, to sum up all the evil deeds of a lifetime, unrepented and unatoned! Between each word, as it was dragged from her lips, she gasped for breath, as though in pangs of suffocation.

'Lady Diana Hope Trevor, did you ever love your husband?'

A slight quiver of contempt curled her proud and beautiful lip, saying: 'With the love of a wife who has chosen her husband, to forsake all the world for him, I did not,

if that is what you mean: I strove to do my duty by him, as best I could.'

'Your duty done as best you could—there was dissension between you through his jealousy? Was that so?'

'No; he was kind to me—almost always.'

'Almost always; and you abused that kindness?'

'No man has a right to say I did.'

'You cannot deny that you married him, preferring another man in your heart? Is that true?'

After long silence—'It may be true, or untrue.'

'It may also be true that, being married, your husband never gained your affections, pre-occupied by that other man?'

Another pause.

'I acted in all things towards Sir John Hope Trevor as a wife should who loves her husband.'

'We do not think so.'

'Your thoughts have nothing to do with me.'

'They have with your conduct; did you not, as a wife, endeavour to retain your power over Arthur, by exciting his passion for you, which was not lawful?'

'I strove to keep him as a friend to myself and my husband.'

'To your husband, or yourself only? What kind of friendship was this, kept secret between a man and woman who could not lawfully be joined to each other? Were you content that the Sahib Arthur should take a wife, or did you endeavour to keep him apart from all others, as your European custom is that women keep their own husbands?'

'I never was Arthur's keeper.'

'Then why was he never married?'

'That he can answer for himself.'

'No, because you can answer the truth, as you are sworn to do, and tell how you lured him on from year to year, with pledges which were unlawful to be kept, that on your husband's death you both should marry; this it is not within your power to deny.'

She was lifted to her feet by indignation, and threw back her veil, facing my kinsman; then said:

'I do deny, I dare you to prove this lie.'

'There are witnesses who can reveal it as a truth.'

'None but my waiting-maid, Victorine —utterly unworthy of credit.'

'Can you deny their charges, upon your oath? Can you declare that this intimacy between you and Arthur was restrained within your bond as a wife?'

'Upon my solemn oath I do declare that I have never fallen.'

'Fallen or not, can you deny that you did exhaust a woman's arts and charms to entice this man, your husband's friend, to sin?'

'I know not, I know not. I may have tempted him against my will—I loved him.' She broke down in loud sobs.

'You loved him, and he rejected your advances?'

'He loved me the better, when he did.'

'He was compelled by his duty to avoid you?'

'And if he did, that proves he loved me; a man does not fear a woman because he loves her not—he fears her most when he loves her too well!'

'When did this love you speak of first arise between you?'

'When I was a girl—when both were very young.'

'Did Arthur ever ask you in marriage of your father?'

'He did not—he was too proud, and I was given in marriage to another.'

'And you pursued him afterwards, threw yourself in his way again and again, until your husband saw your treachery and it drove him mad.'

'Am I to bear the reproach of his madness?'

'In that he preferred a lingering death to life with you—unless he were murdered, rather.'

'And if he were, it would be for you to discover who did the act, not I, who could

help nothing. How freely would I give all that I possess in the world to anyone who would bring that deed home to the guilty, and set me right.'

'That so you could be married to Arthur?'

'Is that your questioning? I never meant to say such a thing.'

'Yet you desired your husband's death, and the freedom thus to be gained, with that object only in your view: you thought to marry at your desire; woman, answer.'

'I thought—what could I think to affect my husband's life and my own honor?'

'You thought that Arthur would not reject you in marriage, after your passion for him had brought you down to the earth in guilt and shame: you looked to him to lift you up. Is this false, or true?'

She had no words to answer; I could see the woman writhe under the scathing interrogatory, deadly white, as a spasm of mortal pain: more cruel than rack, or

fiery ordeal, the question was pressed, until she turned upon her tormenter, grown bold in desperation, as it were, to grasp by the neck the hooded snake and so defeat its sting.

'Do your will to me,' she said; 'I have told you enough and too much already—I will answer you nothing further: you may let me go, or commit me for contempt if you dare—it is quite indifferent to me what becomes of me.'

They did not dare, however, or could not carry the point with that severity, against the English element in the Commission; and so Lady Diana left the Court, unassailable by law, but branded with a suspicion of murder which no power or process could remove, save one—the discovery of the true criminal. No one, save me only, but believed that she had lied in another matter also, and sworn away the life of her soul to conceal her shame.

CHAPTER IV.

LION AND MOUSE.

THE next morning all Calcutta within the ditch was astir betimes, with a nine days' wonder as to the why and wherefore such strange and even illegal severity had been practised in the witness-box upon the British General's widow. The Oriental genius for torture had been suffered to exhaust itself freely upon her, as if by way of amends or compensation to the Hindoo public feeling, so outraged by the abolition of widow burning, an essential rite of the Brahmin religion, which, being condemned by a British court as murder, and put down by the strong arm of the law, such resentment burned in the bosoms of the very

women for whose behoof the reform was enforced, that the Mutiny was held, by many wise persons, to be our natural punishment for such interference with the liberty of the heathen conscience. The same wise persons, who usually have something to say upon every question, more or less, of Indian government or social custom, were now disposed to revoke their condemnation passed during the previous months on the still unheard parties in this cause, in favor at least of one of them.

This revulsion of feeling was due to Arthur's voluntary tender of his evidence to the Court. Need it to be told that I was present, and how I strove to remain unseen by him, unobserved by others, while on his every word my life and soul were hanging? Through the woman, a dark suspicion clung to him from which, if he should fail to stand out clear, then, by the unwritten law which shapes all law, he must submit to be stripped of all that gives life its worth to such a man—his office and

his honors, his place in the eye of millions, far harder and more bitter now to resign than sweet at first in the earning. And I to save him! What mad hope could stir my pulses with such a thought? Why, such a deed would be a higher service than my ancestor, Robert le Fort Escu, the strong knight, rendered to the Conquerer on Hastings' field, when the monarch's life was saved through the guard of that warrior's good shield. Such, and more, should be the merit of Arthur's honor shielded by me, a girl. If this could be!

He fought his battle nobly, sparing the woman, with a proud disdain to defend himself. He owned that he had loved her beyond the bonds of lawful friendship or strict prudence; but upon his honor, and upon his solemn oath, denied all imputation touching her virtue, or his own respect for her as the wife of his friend. Concerning the foul dealing that friend had met with in his death, Arthur declared that he knew nothing. Beyond this no

question was pressed upon him. To me it was clear that he suspected Lady Diana of a guilty knowledge, at least, in the matter, but believing that the act was prompted by love of him, he said as little as he could to betray his thought. While he spoke of her, so tenderly and sadly, I felt assured all the more, for the gentle forbearance of his tone, that those two were parted now for ever. His eye searched round through the crowded audience, as it were to find out his enemy, whoever dared to doubt his chivalrous worship of the slight thing who had worked him such a sea of woes. And as it searched, it fell on me, where I crouched, hiding my face—yes, on me! I glanced up, and there was a light upon his countenance. He knew that I believed his words, I knew that there was joy in that trust to him! Where was the task or the danger too great now for my great love to overcome? Against all the world I would dare all for him!

Much other evidence was given on suc-

ceeding days, which I did not hear; but the common conclusion was, in European society, that the Maharajah was in some way implicated through his servants, Lady Diana being presumed an accomplice, or principal party in the act, according to the interpretations put by the more charitable or uncharitable of the commentators.

After several days' suspense, the verdict of the Court was announced, acquitting the Maharajah's servants, and thus, in as far as it lay with them, confirming the common Oriental prejudice, and throwing the whole burden of guilt upon Lady Diana. This conclusion was brought about through all the native Commissioners being unanimous in favor of their countrymen, while one European gave a casting vote to the same effect, in opposition to all the other English judges, who held there was clear evidence of poison traced to the General's chamber from the Maharajah's palace, the only doubtful fact being as to whose hand administered the fatal draught, or left it in the victim's way; the last link which lacked

to complete the chain was the missing Ouda.

These conclusions, freely rumored and commented upon, by the Press in India and England, were followed by the deposition of the suspected Maharajah from his musnud and raj, on other grounds than those alleged on the trial; his removal was carried with a high hand, on the open charge of misgovernment and abuse of his power, although the true cause remained doubtful to none. No miscarriage of justice could be tolerated in those days, as against the life of an Englishman amongst the subject race; but there still hung in the balance the trembling issue of Arthur's resignation or recall.

I knew not what to do, nor how to serve him, when at last, we being on a visit to friends outside of Calcutta, I was summoned to the garden of our compound to see a strange fakir, who refused to be turned away without speaking to me. This proved to be my uncle's outcast son, my cousin Nazir Jung. I knew him, in his

dirt and rags, having but once met before. Signing me to be silent, his hint was obeyed by me; I sent away the attendants out of ear-shot, and in low, hurried speech we conferred together.

'I have heard something to put me on the track,' he whispered. 'Ouda lives concealed amongst the servants of a temple, the holiest of Brahma's shrines in Central India. As a fakir, I have become one of the most sacred and privileged class amongst priests and people of the land, I can do bold things now, and venture into sanctuaries, assured of safe return; there may I seek the knowledge we would find, where a common man must meet certain and cruel death.'

'And you come to me with this news, no doubt for some help, such as I should give. Speak, and command me to the utmost of woman's power.'

'I shall require you in this search to be my companion—' An involuntary shudder of mine interrupted him. 'Not to live a life such as I live, hiding as the wild

beast in the jungle, travelling by night as the jackal of the dark, whom your Feringhee huntsmen track out and slay. No, be borne as a lady to the Holy City, where we may meet at the end of our different journeys; but your presence I must have, to question the woman when we find her, and some token you must bring from the mistress she betrayed, to put her in fear, that she may answer us the truth. No other means of constraint may we use—her person is devoted to the gods.'

He named the city where Ouda was to be met with, a very crater of the Mutiny, known to European ears as a name of dread and trembling, where the crushed fires of rebellion still burned low, fed with the deep craft and malice of Hindoo revenge. Thither I too was bound to make my way; I gave him my promise to that effect, and he was gone. How to keep it? That was the question, without even money at command at all commensurate to the enterprise put upon me. Lady Cameron would not help me—she grew

white with horror at the first mention of such a project; to venture beyond the Calcutta ditch was, in her mind, to overstep the utmost bound, beyond which virtue and honor could no farther go, in the guise of British-bred young ladyhood. I was admonished to take to mind the example of Miss Wheeler and others, fabled to have met some soul-appalling fate by the Anglo-Indian imagination, so rich in horrors in those days. Death was the least of the misfortunes to be predicted in my case, if I would persist in making myself the heroine of a hideous romance; if I lived through it, it would be to pray that my friends might only think of me as one dead, which, as Lady Cameron explained to me, would be a most painful thing for her to have to do. Altogether, she deprecated and condemned this most improper design, tending moreover to the interruption of all her own more important projects of dinner parties, dances and fancy balls, which could not be decently carried out, if I made myself so disobliging as to

thrust my head into the tiger's mouth in the height of the gay season: it was enough to bring about the death of a poor deserted old woman! But the young woman had graver business on hand than could pause at such considerations.

To Lady Diana I made my way next, her interest being so bound up with mine, that without the action of both no help could be found for either. Money of hers I could neither touch, nor could she dare to offer me, but that equally essential to bear my purpose through, a means to work upon the fugitive Ouda's fears, I was compelled to obtain from my rival.

Alone, I sought her abode, and my name was taken up to her by a dusky retainer, with a grin of delighted recognition, as he caught a glimpse of my semi-oriental features, and pricked up his ears at my name, 'Leila.' Down he ran, after a brief delay, with a 'salaam,' the Indian 'at home,' conveying with eye and gesture, as is the wont of servants in all lands, the sort of welcome I had to expect in that

house from its mistress: as a visitor to be treated with reverence and dread, he hung about my steps, up to the carpet of her boudoir, then, bending low, he vanished.

Reluctantly I stood in her presence, and she reluctantly suffered mine: my keen eyes were riveted upon her; without my will to hurt, I felt her shuddering beneath the arrows fixed by my gaze into her heart. She half rose, twisting round her form upon the low couch of luxurious pillows, where she lay beneath the burden of her agony.

'You, you too?' she gasped out. 'Are you come to torture me with questions, before they drag me out again to answer for what I have not done? are you come to wring the life out of me? Well, have it, then: kill me at once!'

'God forbid, Lady Diana: I am not your judge, neither could I touch your life or honor without hurt to a nobler heart than yours or mine: from me you are safe, if only you can be saved from the world. I believe in your ayah's guilt: whether you

were her accomplice or not, before or after your husband's death, is known to your own conscience, and to the man for whom you have made love a curse.'

The shaft hit home, and she broke out in loud wild bursts of weeping; peal after peal her sobs were rent out of her, like the thunder and rain of the Himalaya mountains: a fiery tempest, ungovernable, save by the hand of God.

'He believes that I have done it all—that I am a murderess for his sake; and he hates me. What matter for the rest? he hates, he loathes me.'

'And yet how nobly he spares you, Lady Diana; and after his example, and to save his name from taint by connection with yours, I am come, if it be possible, to discover and prove the truth; to clear you if you are innocent.'

Again she burst forth. 'He believes me guilty; clear me of that, and give me back his love.'

'Are you mad, Lady Diana? His love—no, no: that love is not for such as you!'

A light laugh rang from her scornful lips: that cruel laugh I knew so well.

'Not for such as me!' she repeated. 'Come, that's flattering from a chit of a girl like you: what do you know about passion, or what was between me and Arthur? Before you were born his love was given irrevocably to me.'

Her tone of quiet contempt for me as a rival was another thorn in my heart, added to the sharp pangs of fear shooting through and through me at the thought that I might be actually working to draw these two together again. Even that anguish was less bitter than to suffer stain to touch his unsullied fame—that better part of him, where I had fixed my fond idolatry of love; but if my work of that day were to lead to such a conclusion, and that so it must be, then best that I made an end quickly!

'We will not speak of such things, Lady Diana; words between you and me are best unspoken, save for bare need. I have discovered a trace of Ouda, which I

mean to follow up, myself alone, so far as European aid or companionship is concerned.'

'What! you will rush upon death or shame?'

'No, Lady Diana; you forget that I am a daughter of the land where you are an alien; I have friends, protectors, guides —but that is nothing to you. Give me a token to your servant, that I may, when I meet, recall in her mind some sense of authority to compel the truth from her lips; tell me some circumstance of your life, known only to her and to you, or give me some gem or writing, that may assure her I speak as in your name, from mistress to maid—if indeed it is to your interest that all should be brought to light!'

Again Lady Diana writhed upon her couch, as she wrung the words out of her heart, in answer to my appeal.

'Yes, yes, I know it must be told—repeat it, girl, to that wretch who forsook me, having made me appear to consent to the guilt that was hers, not mine! Yes, tell

her from me what she knows, what has never yet passed my lips to living ear. He who is dead knew well that I loved Arthur, knew it, and was silent; it may be that was what broke his heart, and drove him to despair and suicide. I do not see what motive the woman could have had to murder him.' She paused, shuddering, then went on. 'Tell her how one night my husband came home and found her—yes, her—lying across the door where I and Arthur were together; when she kept guard over that scene no friend of mine would ever have consented to—if I had had a friend, not a slave, in her, to serve my passion and betray my soul! Tell her how my husband spurned her aside with his foot, and spared the wife who was not worthy of him, and the friend to whom that wife had given herself in passionate longing, if not in actual guilt! Yes, yes, he came back in time! It was never to be spoken of again, but from that night was made a separation between me and my husband—we were no longer one, but two

—though not before the world, and only she knew! This is as much as can meet your ear, or I repeat, for very shame. Yes, you may tell her all this, and she will know that you come from me.'

She rose to her feet with a fall of light draperies, and a breath of perfumes through the warm air of the evening; bending and gliding through the fast closing dusk—for our interview had lasted through hours—she made her way to a Japanese cabinet of old red lacquer-work, like carven sealing-wax, the spoil of a burnt palace, offered to General Hope Trevor as a gift of honor. His widow unlocked it, and took out an ivory miniature, set as a brooch in a necklet, with rare and cunning work of rich gems.

'You know that face?' she said, with a straight gaze into my eyes. 'Do you not know it? then look at it well!'

I did so, and the features grew familiar, as a tender memory of the dead. It was a face resembling mine, but more beautiful by far. A lovely young face, set round

with the veils and head-tire of the Orient; features of pure and delicate outline, with the rich glow of the sun upon their tints; such a face as the high-caste daughters of Brahma only wear, and yet there was a likeness to me. The words burst from my lips: 'My mother! was this my mother?'

'Yes, it was; and you wonder, as well you may, to receive such a gift from my hands. You did not recognise it, but Ouda will; she knows the ornament which I hated to wear for your sake, girl, and kept hid in this cabinet, out of my sight. Your father wore it next his heart, and after he was killed, a sepoy of the burial party took it from his body, and brought it to Arthur, who was the officer in command at that battle; he would never have parted with it to anyone in the world but me.'

This was indeed bitter, yet I took the portrait from her hand, and said: 'This is mine now; you shall never take it from me again, whatever else your fatal influence may destroy in this unhappy life of mine;

you may cut me off from hope, but not from this remembrance, hallowed by death for ever. Oh, father, father! here rested your last dying kiss—here, where my lips are clinging now!'

I kissed the portrait, moistening it with my passionate lips, as if the cold dead could answer me; for the moment I had forgotten her who stood before me, and the task that lay at my hand.

'How will you go through the country? who will travel with you? and where is the place you must reach? what do you mean to do?'

'Never you trouble yourself about that, Lady Diana; with God's help, what I must do, I will. I am going to search out and question Ouda; by word and sign I can now identify myself with your authority, recall the habit of obedience that never utterly dies out in the Eastern slave. Where an agent of the Government dare not pass, I may safely penetrate, and wring out some hidden truth from the guilty. If I succeed I shall come back; if not, my

friends and foes of Europe shall see my face no more!'

Thus I took my leave of her, and my parting with other companions was brief, before I set out on my journey. I saw my uncle again, but not to ask help of him in money, neither did he offer anything beyond his advice and countenance; but these, with what gold and jewels I had, might suffice me. He gave me letters and gifts that were more than money's worth, so that I could pass from end to end of Hindostan without ever lacking an open door, and bread and salt at my need. Thus friended, I set out, with native attendance only, towards the Holy City, whither I was bound, to meet Nazir Jung, his rejected son, my cousin.

CHAPTER V.

I RUSH THROUGH PERIL.

ONCE far away from the white-walled 'City of Palaces,' and the domains of the iron horse left many a league behind, I had to trust my frail person and the great hope brooding in my heart to such tenderness or mercy as my helpless condition might win me of my countrymen. I was fain to travel as befitted a high-born daughter of the land; sometimes in a palanquin, closely curtained, and borne on men's shoulders, sometimes in a chopaya, an Indian travelling apartment, drawn by bullocks; riding, the favourite means of locomotion amongst European ladies, would have been held unseemly in me.

From one stage to another I was conveyed, like a very precious and fragile piece of merchandise, by order of the Rajahs, Maharajahs, and other exalted personages to whom I was consigned, as it were in a chain of protection, reaching from palace to palace, up to the gates of the great temple whither I was bound.

I was rested now and then in the shady gardens and chambers of some fairy-like zenana, whose fair inmates would strive to hold communication with me; and under manifold difficulties of dialect, it was impressed upon me once and again, how my manners, personal appearance, and, more especially, my costume, sinned against the decrees of the Oriental Mrs. Grundy: on the two former points, I was past praying for, to any of the innumerable gods of my fair critics' idolatry; on the last, I was brought, through repeated undressings, bathings, with sage lessons and examples, into the way in which I should go, to defy detection and suspicion amongst the fierce, fanatical race of Christian-haters with

whom my lot was cast for the task before me.

As I penetrated farther into remote parts of the Peninsula, like a fine blade into a rich scabbard of marvellous work, I found myself promoted from men's shoulders to those of the nobler beast of burden, on elephant back, in a howdah, that most lordly of seats ever contrived for imperial progresses. Not for the pride of it, but for the pleasure, did I joy in my heart to look out upon the wide-spread beauties of the wondrous land, where the lotus flower makes perfume for gods, and the deep grass yields passage to the trampling feet of the huge beast, whose vast sides plunge through the giant herbage as a strong ship cleaves her passage through the sea waves. After many days, my cavalcade paused at eventide before the magnificent gate of the great city, where my rendezvous was with Nazir Jung. There he was awaiting me, but suffered me to pass without notice, as he stood beneath the statue-crowned portal, in the

wretched garment that covered but little of his foul and mangled skin. It was very pitiful to look upon him thus, and to think how near he was to me in blood, which is thicker than water.

I was lodged in the house of a priest, close over against the temple of the divinity, whose worship prevailed in that city; one of the thousand incarnations of the god of the Hindoos. Here I was fain to bide in patience and seclusion, until the wonder and curiosity, aroused by the strange manner of my intrusion within those sacred walls, should have died out among the inhabitants, human as well as dumb, of the holy place. Ramnarrain, as my host was called, a tall and slender statue draped in white, peered down upon me with a face of bronze set in marble, not unkindly, though with no nerve or fibre of human sympathy in its unalterable lines. In words so few that I guessed his meaning rather than understood, he conveyed to me my freedom to range at will within the precincts of the temple, but not to wander beyond

the sacred ground, where I was bound to submit to curious examination by every living thing that roamed about the pillars and arches, in and out amongst the elaborate ornamentation, of which they sometimes appeared to form a part. Monkeys and sacred cows, peacocks and ring-doves, cast their shadow upon the temple's pavement, or stood reflected in the blue water beneath its towers; and from the inner sanctuary stepped out into the sunlight troops of dark-eyed priestesses, and dancing girls with jewelled ankles and faces unveiled, to gaze upon the stranger like a flock of sheep, in mute surprise at the novelty of an intruder on their pastures. Long and anxiously I returned their gaze, and made demand of their names one by one, in hope of discovering her I sought, of whose presence here I had been assured by Nazir Jung. He did not come to me, as he had promised, and I, desperate at my disappointment, appealed to Ramnarrain for guidance as to my next step in this bewildering pass. He

made me no answer, beyond the assurance that the name of Ouda was unknown to him; that to his certain knowledge it was borne by no priestess, dancer, or servant of his god. What then was I to do?

I could not go out into the city, where Nazir Jung prayed and cut his body, living the life of a beggar and a dog in the filthy rags of heathen righteousness, taking his brief nightly rest, with many others of his miserable tribe, under a vast banyan tree near the temple. Evening and morning, my occupation was to attend at the unrobing and attiring of the hideous stone monster, elaborately dressed, undressed, attended and served with rich food and wine, as if the senseless idol held a life within its grim, insatiable eyes, greedy only of the sacrifice of blood offered to devils, by men who knew not God. Day after day, through the blinding heat, I sat at my window in the sun, looking for the chance of Nazir Jung passing by. At last I discovered him beneath the banyan tree, and soon attracted his eye towards the

latticed casement where I watched, wearing my heart away in such idle waiting. I dared to make a sign, and sing a few low notes, in hopes he would recognise my voice, my face being hid from him by the intricate frame-work between me and the light. In swift alarm, he raised a finger to his lips, and then passed beneath me out of sight; I knew, though, that he was entering the labyrinth of those jealously guarded precincts, and that amidst their turns and windings he knew how to wend his way to me.

In half-an-hour he stood before me, bringing with him the priest, Ramnarrain, who asked me, in Nazir Jung's presence, how I had fared since I claimed the protection of the gods, and his, as their minister? —a shade of apprehension in his voice betraying his sense of unfaithfulness to some duty imposed upon him for my behoof. Promptly catching at the clue to power, I said, that though my treatment had been kind, so far as delicate food and soft couch could serve me, my mind had

suffered tortures of suspense, devised, it seemed to me, by some devil's cunning, ever since my evil star had guided me beneath the dark archways, where the very purpose that had brought me was made a mystery, never to be solved by any effort of mine. On this, the fakir turned a look upon the priest, causing him to argue in self-defence that the whole precincts of the temple and its belongings, wherever its servants were domiciled, were open ground for my inquiries; that it was not his fault if the person I sought chose to conceal herself, as he could not answer for any woman under his charge being recognisable by her proper name. 'Ouda,' the one I asked for, was not answered to by any female there: he knew no more.

'Then I will find a means to make you speak that which you do not know,' said the fakir, with a look of fierce command, and a rising tone that, with such few and simple words, transformed the dignity of Brahma's priest into the abject terror of a cowering slave, whose falsehood, set as a

screen before his fault, has been dashed to the ground by his angry master. A spell seemed cast, like the magician's, who conjured to his will the genius of the ring, upon the grand form of the priest in his own temple, by this thing of dirt and bleeding stripes, who spoke as a master before the very shrine; all disguises and prevarications were cast away as useless before his supreme command.

'I know not Ouda,' resumed the trembling wretch, 'but Azeezun I know. You are free to question all inmates of this holy enclosure; stand at the gate, that none may enter or pass out, without your interrogation, and learn of whom you may amongst her companions who bears the name of Azeezun: it may be that you will receive an answer to your doubts ere long.'

Azeezun! I had heard that name before, as one associated in European ears with the drama of blood and horrors played out at Cawnpore, before God and the sun: a name blazoned in the red halo of slaughter

and of shame: a name to make the ear and cheek of British womanhood tingle with the hot flush which burns for blood-revenge: but which I, an Indian born, could hear with unchanged color and unblenching nerve—for had not the tale of cruelties been made equal between her people and mine?

'Azeezun!' I repeated; 'was that the same who set men at Cawnpore to butcher ladies and little children: the fury of Bithoon, the beautiful dancing girl?'

'Hush!' said the priest, in soft low tones, like the purring of a cat, or cheetah, the leopard of chase; 'if you speak of such things above your breath, there will be a rising of priests and people against your designs; nay, I could not answer for your life, except with my own head. You must work cautiously to find her, and then worm your way into her confidence, as women know how to do to one another: you must meet her as a friend—to use her as your bitterest foe, if afterwards it be your will. First make her speak, and then,

so that no other be concerned to strengthen her resistance, I will not put the value of one dancing woman's life against my lord the great Sahib's will. Go forth, and the gods speed you in this business.'

And so we took our stand by the temple gates; the fakir outside, before the statues of the gods, which looked boldly out upon their approaching worshippers, I in concealment within the portals. So, relieving one another, from sun to sun we watched, accosting every female who entered there, with the same inquiry after the object of our search; from sun to sun, we took patience, but no Azeezun presented herself at those marvellous gates, where we stood wondering and fixed, like their images of stone.

Nazir Jung, suspicious of some prevarication of the truth, or wilful concealment by the priest of what he choose not to know, put the matter to him again; how his own eyes had seen the woman we were in search of, at a feast in that very temple, three months before. If the priest could

not tell whom he had suffered thus to approach the shrine of his god, a vengeance more dread than that of any human power was denounced against him by the fakir in Brahma's name, the master of all things in heaven and earth. Ramnarrain swore by the waters of Ganges that he was powerless to solve the mystery; then bethought himself of the fact, that on the occasion named by Nazir Jung, a strange woman, of great skill in the dance, had been brought in to teach a new step to the regular ministrants of the sanctuary. Yes, it was possible her face might have peered in and out from beneath her veil, as the troops of dancers glided in set after set, moving in and out around the uncovered shrine. But her name, he swore again, with mightier adjuration, had never been uttered in his hearing. This was enough, however, although a direct contradiction of his former assertions as to Azeezun. Out of the two conflicting statements, the truth was to be gathered, and by perseverance, a communicative nautch girl was

induced to betray her instructress's whereabouts to us.

Forthwith, she was summoned to the temple, by a special message from Ramnarrain, to the effect that she was required for the service of the altar. No indication of the true cause having put her on her guard, she came. Ramnarrain saw her first; then he warned the fakir of her desperate character, that could not be intimidated, except by resorting to such extremities as neither priests nor people would suffer him to use with her; torture alone, he assured us, could unlock that woman's tongue. I asked them to leave the task to me.

Alone, I entered the low and narrow chamber, a by-nook stolen out of the grand architecture of the building, where they had bestowed Azeezun, pending our decision of her fate. We seemed cramped and confined together within that narrow space, like a human being and a tiger cat hanging round a single tree. I was armed with a tiny revolver and a dagger of keenest edge, as a last resort; these weapons had been

companions of my adventurous journey: though willing to tempt my fate, I had taken such precautions to hold my life and honor in my own keeping. During all the vast unknown ground I had traversed, these defensive arms had lain by my hand untouched, almost unthought of; but in the instant I found myself shut in with this strange woman, my fingers by instinct sought them out in my bosom. I had met my foe.

Our eyes glared at one another, alike in their eastern fire, yet so unlike in the spirit that was within, to lighten through those windows. In one, the hell-fire of mortal hate, stirred by man's wrong: in the other, the quenchless lamp of love, kindled by heaven's own hand: this made me the stronger, to dare and suffer all. I looked at the fierce thing I had to master, and without a tremor, spoke gently to her.

'I am a woman like yourself—do not fear, or mistrust me. I have neither the will nor the power to hurt you, but seek from your lips the knowledge that may

serve such good end both for myself and others, as may help to expiate—Ouda, or Azeezun, I know you what you were; they tell me you have been very wicked and cruel; very beautiful, too, they say.'

As I spoke, she approached me by a step or two, until the narrow space would scarce permit of my stirring, unless we closed upon one another as foes, or embraced as friends who love. She eyed me from head to foot, saying:

'It is you who have all the beauty now; but that will go, as mine has gone, in few years; we Indians are women at an age when the Feringhee's daughters are but children, and they are young and fair at the same years that make us old. What is your age?'

'I shall be twenty-one next May.'

'Twenty-one! and unmarried — untroubled by man's love or woman's treachery?'

'I cannot say so much—but unmarried certainly.'

'Ay, still so fresh and fair! and I am

but four years your senior, and I have grown old. You look at me and tell me I have been beautiful. Ah, you think yourself happy, with your insolence of birth.'

'Happy, no! I am guiltless of that crime,' I expostulated, bearing with her compassionately, as I looked at that pinched and faded face. She seemed so old, I could scarcely believe her that she was but twenty-five; truly all her beauty was consumed away like burnt grass beneath the brazen heaven, all but those wondrous eyes of hers, the sole abiding charm left to the lovely fiend, Azeezun!

'Do not think that I am happy, to hate me,' I pursued; 'I have suffered as much as ever woman could suffer, who had done wrong to none; and the cause of all my sorrows is one you know well—your mistress, whom you lived with as an attendant and companion, eating her salt and sleeping in her chamber, who knew you only by the name of Ouda; your lady and my rival.'

'What!—she your rival? you hate her, then—but not as I hate her. They have conjured the poison out of your Indian blood. Some pale-face was your father, who gave you but half a heart, not like this full life of hate and abhorring that pants in me at mention of her—at thought of her—at the sound of her name, Diana of the false, fair face who makes all men her slaves. Oh, could you but bear her a hate like mine, I would throw myself at your feet, and follow you as your slave to the end of the world!'

Her blind fury was very terrible to look upon, as she rolled herself upon the ground, and clasped me round the ankles, like a twining serpent at the foot of a slender tree, which shakes and cracks beneath the reptile's loathsome weight. Repressing my impulse to shrink back, I calmed her, unwinding myself from her grasp, and gliding down upon the floor, until we sat facing each other, and I saw and seized my opportunity.

'Then you will not refuse to answer me

when I ask what strange and strong motive could bring you to live with her? what part you took, or what was your share of guilty knowledge in the terrible deed that was enacted beneath her roof? —the poisoning of a husband——'

'Me, me! you ask me this?' she broke me short, hissing out the words, with a sound in her throat that was half a gurgle, half a shriek. 'And what if I refuse to break the seal upon my lips? By what right do you ask me? What have you to do with what passed between her and me?'

'I have to do with that, by her right as well as my own. In her name, I can repeat to you that awful story which you believe to be buried, never to reach the ear of mortal save your own. She and her husband were parted before his death, as wide as shame and abhorring could make breach between two whom God had joined together. This fact is known to you, as well as the cause—the wife's uncontrolled passion for another man, which at last

opened the eyes of her long confiding husband. They two agreed that the discovery should not be made before the world; to all outward seeming, they lived together as before; the husband disguising his feelings, every hour of his existence having to act a lie, until his true and noble heart broke in the effort; the wife, retaining on sufferance the place and honor she had forfeited, until indifference to the husband she wronged corroded into hate. I speak of what I know, as well as you, and this your mistress bade me tell you in her name; have I a right to be answered now?'

'No: in her name I will answer nothing; what I have done I have done; it is all over between us now.'

She twisted her neck, with a quiet intense fury that ground in her teeth, avoiding me; but I saw I had her at advantage, and pushed in the wedge after its thin end.

'Then in my own cause you shall answer me. Look here; this portrait of

my mother, which Lady Diana gave me, will tell you who I am. If that be not enough to move you to my desire, know that the man who received it from my dead father's breast, and gave it to her rather than to me, its owner by right—this man, her lover, won of me my very heart and soul. All that a maiden could give to man without dishonor, I gave to him; I was his promised bride, and she came between us on the eve of our bridal day—for her, he cast me off, and now, for the horror that you and I feel of her in common, I bid you speak the truth to me.'

She turned as if stung by an adder.

'And if I do speak truth—lay bare to you my soul's secret—what will you do with the knowledge which I alone can give you? Will you use it to her hurt, as I would have you to do?'

'I will not deceive you—if possible, she shall be rescued from the worst disgrace, the taint of suspected murder, and by me; this shall be my great revenge.'

'I cannot take in your meaning—what,

you to justify her, who hate her—how can this be ?'

'Because in her doom is involved the name dear to me above all on earth. How could I bear to strike her whom I hate, through his bosom whom I love ?'

'But if I could divide their interests, make them, as it were, two targets, for fate to smite upon one, and spare the other—would you then consent with me to destroy her—her alone ?'

'I would not; much wronged as I am, let my vengeance remain in the hand of God.'

'I have heard many such sayings among your people, but this is the first time I ever knew one of you to act according to your words. They call this the Christian faith—I never could have believed it possible.'

'What I have spoken I will act up to.'

'That is not the wont of the Feringhee with us; but you are half my sister. I will think upon what I should do. You ask me to help in her defence—you ask this of me ?'

'Yes, but for his sake. Cannot the warmth of your Eastern heart respond to this chord in mine? So strong is my love for him, that I have come so many thousand miles over sea and land to seek your help in vindicating her, to shield his fame from part in her infamy: be assured I know those two can never come together any more.'

'You are sure of that? Is this enough for me?'

'It should be enough to win your trust and confidence. Will you, oh, will you tell me all that you have done in such deadly hate, in such awful secrecy?'

'It may be that I will—it is possible that I shall not dare—I cannot answer your questions in few words—you must give me time to prepare myself, and I will endeavour to recall the whole story of my life; this you should hear from me, and then decide, and act upon your knowledge as you will. It will be very terrible to me to tell you such things: remember you cannot force me to speak; I could defy you

and be silent—I could choose to die, and bear my secret with me to the bed of fire and silence.'

This was true; therefore I yielded to her for that time, and so we parted, to meet again.

CHAPTER VI.

WHICH SHE WOULD NOT DARE.

THREE days and nights I was left to languish in suspense before that meeting, in mortal doubt whether Azeezun would open her lips at all, or if she did, whether truth could be found in that evil nature, steeped so far in guilt and dissembling. All those days I fed on my own heart's passion, rejecting other food with the loathing of deadly sickness ; all those nights I tasted no sleep, until the third morning, when nature failed, and I sank into dreams of a troubled sea heaving and moaning about me, until I went down beneath the deep waves rolling in horror above my head. Around me rose up the fabric of

the temple where I was, with all its multiplied tracery of Oriental architecture, growing upon me like a forest of coral and sea-plants—half material growth, half sentient life; until I became as a dead corse of the drowned, cast away for slimy, loathsome things to feed upon. Then I felt across my forehead the cold touch of a skin, that sent a shiver through nerve and marrow, as nature revolted against its foul contact—some fish of prey was fastening upon my flesh! With a cry I awaked, and Azeezun was beside me, her cold fingers laid upon my opening eyes. Horror kept me silent until she spoke to me:

'I have prayed to the powers of light and darkness,' she said, 'and come good, come evil of it, I will tell you my tale. Beware how you use the knowledge; truth has its own bittterness—a sharper venom than the cobra's fang.'

My waking glance was fixed and grew into her, unveiling my own thought, while it sought to read out hers.

'You look at me as a monster steeped

in the blood of human lives, covered from crown of head to sole of foot with foulest shames—yet I am a woman like yourself; I was once as fair and innocent, and they called me Azeezun!' Again I shuddered at the name, with an involuntary quiver that shook me, frame and limb. A smile of triumph glanced upon her faded features as she pursued: 'A name of fear, if the woman's glory of love has departed from it. Your Feringhee sahibs suppose that we Eastern women have no power in the world's affairs, because, forsooth, we veil our faces when we go abroad, instead of riding on horses from camp to camp, like men, as they suffer their wives and daughters to do without shame. The fools! they fail even yet to see that the great Mutiny was woman's work. Who stirred the ashes of revolt upon every hearth between Dacca and Corrachee, from Peshawar to Comorin? Three women did the whole, raised the spirit all Britain's power may fail to quell!—the warrior Ranee of Jhansi: the insulted Begum of Oude—she was once a

dancing girl—Zeenat Mahal, the King of Delhi's wife: those were your most dangerous rebels, excepting me, the dancer Azeezun!' A fierce laugh of triumph burst from her lips; no farther word passed them until, after several minutes, it died away. 'A dancer, dedicated in this temple, by my parents, as an offering to the gods. A meritorious act it was in them, to bring as their gift a fair young girl, and a happy fate for her, as we believe in India. She should live pure and chaste during her years of service, and after them be married to a prince or king—be made a Ranee or Maharanee, become a widow, perhaps, and reign in the name of her son. How many dancing girls have borne rule in this land? and which of these has ever been known to betray for another man her wedded faith to her husband? No, no; we leave that virtue to your English wives, who would convert us, and teach us their customs.'

'The yoke of Britain has been laid upon your people for much good, though for some evil.'

'For much evil and little good! What could it profit us that our princes were made your slaves? Yes, the sovereign Peishwa of the Mahrattas was despoiled and thrust out from Poona, his royal city, the seat of his birth and empire; him you banished to the distant north, degraded to the shadow of a king, and doomed to live in exile as the Maharajah of Bithoor.'

'Nana Sahib! Do you mean him?'

'Yes, Nana Sahib! Lord of India's fiercest race; lord of this miserable life of mine: he loved me!'

'Can you speak of such a wretch to couple love with his name? Surely, no woman ever loved that monster—that foul blot on all mankind. I have heard he was in body, as well as soul, a thing of abhorring.'

'Who talked of loving him? My love, my heart's desire, my body's passion was ambition, the strong lust of wealth and power. This he could have gratified in me, as I could gratify his unbridled greed of woman's charms; gold and gems and empire for a maiden's warm young flesh—

which of us two had the best of the bargain? I was cheated of my share—and through her—the English Sirdar's wife.'

'What brought you and her into this strange collision you hint at? It is not a tale to be believed.'

'Believed or not, it is too true. Would I had remained here, in this temple where I was dedicated at the first! But I was athirst for the dew of enjoyment in my flower of youth; I would wander in search of promotion, because it came not soon to me. I asked to go with a troupe of nautch dancers sent from here to distant Bithoor, for Brahma's festival, at the full moon in November, when crowds of pilgrims from every city in India adore the presence of their god, with rich perfumes and flowers, with music, song and dance, and there I too would be. The Maharajah saw me, winding in and out like a serpent among young palm trees, as I led the nautch before Brahma's sacred image: and that night I was sent for by his command, and conveyed through the

silence and darkness into the zenana of his royal palace at Bithoor.'

'You lived through such a fate?'

'I did. If I had known before what it was to be the slave of his will, I should have chosen death rather; but my eyes had never been lifted to his face until he held me in his power—his victim, body and soul: the very breath of my life was his—there was nothing left that I could keep my own.'

'There could be no love between a woman and such a man.'

'No love! but agony and shame enough to be his creature and his toy. He did not throw me away, as was his wont, when he had crushed the flower: he kept me long, and set me in a jewelled vase to bloom as the ornament of his life. I might have been his Maharanee and reigned a princess; my people might have subdued your people, to make them perish from off this land! I might—yes, yes; but for her, but for her!'

'How could she, or all the power of

Britain, reach within the interior of a zenana? Surely no Englishwoman could be your rival there?'

'She could! she was! For two years I had lived in security, though no son was born to my lord. If I was childless, no mere passing favourite had yet been more fortunate than I: there was no tie to prolong the hold of any other upon his bosom; whoever came and went were as shadows of his transient fancy—his preference was fixed on me alone.'

'You ruled his zenana for two years?'

'I did. I will not utter its secrets: the gods were just who gave that house no offspring. But I was punished for the fault that I was childless. The Nana needed an heir to be born to him, not adopted, as he was himself, a Poona merchant's son, into the family of his sovereign prince, Bajee Rao, the last Peishwa of the Mahrattas. The British Lat Sahib rejected the adoption, and refused to acknowledge Nana Sahib amongst the reigning Maharajahs of India, only suffer-

ing him to live, a wealthy and discontented man, in exile at Bithoor. To rise above the foreign Lord Governor's decree, and restore the great empire of the land, was his ambition; to leave an heir to succeed after him was his chief desire—the necessity of his existence, that his name might be continued in posterity, his funeral rites be duly honored by a son, his bones and ashes scattered upon the sacred waters of Ganges by a kindred hand, that so his fierce spirit might come to eternal peace.'

'He could not forego this desire, and live content with you, to forget all else?'

'No, though my love was strong upon him. But there was one who never suffered him to forget or to rest—Azimoolah Khan, his dewan, chief minister, almost his right hand: he was my enemy, ever desiring to supplant my influence by means of some new fancy of his lord. It was time to throw me off, he would tell him, after two years, since I had borne him no children: there would be more hope of offspring from some other woman, if he ceased to waste

his favor upon me. These sayings of Azimoolah were repeated by my lord in his wine: I marked a change in him, and knew who had done me an evil turn.'

'Azimoolah prevailed upon his prince to cast you off?'

'He often tried and often failed in the attempt—I was stronger than he—until he brought that Feringhee woman to his aid.'

'Lady Diana! How could she be brought upon such a scene?'

'Azimoolah had been in England some years before, to present his master's claims before the Lord Sahibs in London. Handsome and cunning, he pushed his cause through the women who show their faces in your public life. He won much favor of many, and, more than the rest, of this Sirdar Hope Trevor's wife; she lived at that time in great state amongst the women about your Queen.'

'She was often seen at Court—that may have been.'

'She met Azimoolah in the Queen's palace, and invited him to her own zenana,

without shame ; feasted him, wrote to him, letters which I have seen in the miscreant's hand—a married woman ! It was some time before the Mutiny that she returned to India with her husband. They were at Lahore, to attend the Lat Sahib, your Governor-General, at his high durbar. They passed, in returning, through Cawnpore. Bithoor is near that situation of the English ; so, by the counsel of Azimoolah, our Maharajah Nana gave a nautch to the English sahibs—not a dance of this country, but a bara nautch—what your people call a ball. Nana bore his part as host, not as our chiefs are accustomed, as a mere spectator, but mingled with the company, and talked with the women, during the pauses of their dances. I had heard of the preparations for the festival, and, with two of my slaves, I crept up veiled to a window that overlooked the room, and saw it all. Men in scarlet, and women half-naked locked in each other's arms, twirling round and round as if they had gone mad. When the music ceased,

their wild whirl ceased with it, and I marked one woman smile upon Azimoolah, while she leaned her arm upon the shoulder of the man who was leading her to dance again. Azimoolah took her hand and kissed it, and she suffered her other arm to fall from the shoulder of the Englishman, who loosed his hold upon her waist. Azimoolah led her to his master, and Nana devoured her beauty with those hungry looks of his I know so well.'

'Was she then so beautiful? Was she——?'

'Yes; she was the Lady Diana. By her beauty she may be known, for in that surely there is none other of your English land that can be compared with her. Tall and stately as a palm tree, with the step of an antelope, a skin like the snow of Himalaya's peaks, blushing beneath the warm glow of the dawn, an eye of the blue heaven, a heart of hell! She was adorned with rich jewels upon her robes of white; but in her hair, of the color of the sun, she wore a wreath of flowers, and a

shower of glittering light waved upon its long curls from a number of tiny beetles, the spoil of this Eastern land. I saw the Maharajah bend down his face almost to touch hers, and push aside the light frame of hoops that balanced beneath her long dress—so close they stood together.'

My breath failed me as I listened with thick beating heart to this description of our common rival's charms. I too had lived in dread and loathing of that deadly beauty. I caught Azeezun by the wrist—no longer shrinking from her touch, so strong our sympathy in heart-ache: I only said:

'Was her husband with her there?'

'He was: but he paid no heed to anything she did. I was told these were English customs, but I could not be deceived in my lord's looks, nor in his coldness to me. After that one night, there was no love left in him.'

'Did she remain at Cawnpore, and revisit Nana's court?'

'She went away with her husband for a

time, and I hoped my lord had forgotten her. I learned all I could about her, and repeated to him every circumstance that could disgust a man; her doubtful fidelity to her husband, her want of children; how old she was, of years to be my mother. But your white faces have the elixir of youth upon their skin of milk. Nana answered me like a man dreaming: "The years are writ upon her forehead only. Her shoulders and bossom are those of a young girl."'

'You heard him speak of her like that?'

'I did; and my patience could bear no more. I mocked—taunted him: bade him long for the moon and stars to come down and fulfil his pleasure. I was mad—mad to do it. Was I not his creature, his thing, the abject slave of his power? Enough that I angered him once: he never left me the opportunity a second time to cross his will.'

'You were punished so unjustly?'

'Yes; but my sentence was merciful for

him. I was not thrown into a loathsome dungeon, nor tortured, nor put to a lingering death: I was merely banished from beneath his roof, thrust out destitute to starve and perish, or live, if live I could—it was no matter to him.'

'Could you not return to the temple of your gods, and be received again?'

'His cast-off plaything? No: in my shame he had broken me; the gods reject an offering of vile things—I could live but as the cast-away of earth and heaven!'

'How could you live, thus?'

'I had beauty, skill in music and song, and in the dance, a perfection of grace and charm no man could look upon and resist the maddening spell. I did not need to lack for way of life, for means of vengeance; I had what could purchase both. Ask me no more.'

I made no answer, but instinctively withdrew my hand, and shrank from my companion. Fixing her eyes for a moment on mine, which swerved from that bold look, she rose to her feet, and laughed at

me—the horrible laugh of her miserable kind.

'What! this is a way to live your modesty dreams not of. Oh no! it must not be spoken of in your presence, though you cannot be ignorant that such things are. And what had I to lose that I was not already reft of? Had I any farther to fall? What more had I to fear from man's brutal passions, than I had already suffered, the slave of Nana's will? He was hideous to look upon, to touch—as revolting to every sense, as degrading to the soul! After him, indeed, it was lucky for me that in myself I still was left such tempting ware to sell.'

This was worse to me to hear than Lady Diana's scornful mock; the base insult of a creature of my race, fallen to that lowest depth of corruption, which, when a woman has reached, she is so much worse than man, that even purity in another is an offence to her. Still, as it was my cue to gather more, I remarked:

'You lived through the Mutiny at *Cawnpore*?'

'I did, right merrily, as the bride of a regiment in revolt—the second cavalry: the second, too, in mutiny, the first who followed the lead at Delhi. They were a legion of brave men, and I, a brave woman, set them on to fight, as a band of heroes. Brothers, I called them to one another, those lovers of mine. I was their leader and their chief; I rode among them upon a horse, wore their uniform, and bore arms —a warrior fiercer and bolder than any man among them: weak woman as I am, my courage rose with danger, ready to do or die.'

'The revolt followed, then, close upon your dismissal from Nana's palace?'

'Oh, ay! The first hot blast that met me as an outcast was the "devil's wind," rising against the hated power of the Feringhee. The Maharajah had other cares to brood upon in his zenana, besides vain passionate desire of English beauty—other dreams to fill his nights of a redder pillow than golden locks and a bosom of the lotus flower. Not many months

after the blonde Englishwoman had bidden him farewell as a guest at his palace, the baked cakes were preparing in every house, the symbolic chupatties sent from neighbor to neighbor, from village to village, as the sign and signal to make known among the freeborn sons of the soil that the hour was ripe, the time of deliverance at hand. The day was appointed, by gods and men, for the upheaving of the Feringhee's yoke —one hundred years from their victory of Plassy, which gave this land to be their spoil for one hundred years beneath the curse, until Sunday, the twenty-third of June. Oh, had we been patient till that day! But our fury could not be guided, and we rose against the oppressor, not all at once, but separately, before the favorable time: hence, they proved too strong for us, to the ruin of all.'

'But your friends of the second cavalry fought on the Nana's side. Why did you join in his designs, after he so cruelly used you?'

'Because I knew his designs were the

planning of a fool, to draw destruction on his own head. In May, before the outbreak, Lady Diana came a second time to Cawnpore. She was on her way to Simla, to save her health during the hot months; her husband was to follow her, but she came only with her attendants, and stopped to rest on her journey at the house of the English magistrate, Sir George Parker. It was said that she was weak and ailing, and could proceed no farther. The Nana's breast took fire; he flattered his imagination with the hope of possessing her as his prisoner—not the first proud English dame who has found herself in the power of such a foe.'

'She escaped him then? I have heard that a cruel death, yet without even a fear of dishonor, was the worst doom that befell Englishwomen and their babes at the Nana's hands.'

'He slew all in his rage. When the fort, for so many weeks defended by English valor, was surrendered at last by Sir Hugh Wheeler, the Maharajah looked

to find her with the rest—but lo! she was gone, escaped, none knew how or whither. The most of her attendants remained behind in Cawnpore, and were dispersed or murdered. They were native Christians, and held firm to their superstition; not one could be compelled to speak, all chose to suffer death, rather than betray their mistress to her enemies. Long afterwards, it was discovered that the great Sirdar Arthur had risked his life, and exposed his army to the hazard of being cut to pieces, for the sake of coming to her rescue: she was safe within the strongest fortress yet remaining under the British power.'

'There was great love between those two,' I muttered, mechanically, with my lips, the thoughts coming half aloud, without my will.

'Ay, you say so with more truth than you know of. How great that love was, none ever knew but I, who saw so much of them both together.'

'How came you there? you, who so hated her!'

'Who can discern the influences of the stars? Can man foretell or control the magic changes of mortal life? Find me an enchanter who can do that, and to him shall earth and sea yield up their hidden treasures, and make him lord of the world. The Maharajah Nana threw off the mask of a false friend, to wear the bold front of an open foe. He took upon him his hereditary rank, as Peishwa of the Mahrattas, proclaimed his rights to empire, and defended them to the last with sword and fire. But not to that false traitor was it given to cope with Britain's imperial race. As he betrayed my love, so was his own hope betrayed: dismay and shame and misery were the handmaids of his tent as he fled before his enemies.'

'And in this is your pleasure now, that you can exult over his destruction?'

'My pleasure, my triumph! I had not to toil for that myself: offended fate and the indomitable power of England worked out my revenge. Yes, yes; I was well repaid at last, for every outrage, for every

wrong. I followed in his track, I sought out his last place of refuge, I traced the footsteps of his flight through the Himalayan desert, and I found a mangled shape upon the ground, rotting in the sun. None would approach it, but the vultures and myself, so loathsome was the thing: but I —I bent above it, until I knew what remained there, rejected by the vultures, as he had rejected me. I knew my enemy.'

'You believed that it was he?'

'I knew it; knew the form that had clasped me, the lips that had been glued to mine. He threw me away like offal, when he thought to become sole sovereign of the East, to restore the empire of the Mogul in his own person, and issue his commands from the peacock throne to Indian and Feringhee as his slaves. And thus the wrath of fate was accomplished upon him: all that remained for me was to work out my own particular revenge upon the woman who had supplanted me.'

'And that was in your power?'

'Ay, surely as my resolution was fixed

to its aim. The great Sirdar Arthur restored her to her husband, who took her back to England, where high honors and rank were conferred upon them, and the Sirdar Arthur followed, after he had trodden out the last spark of life in the heart of this Indian people. But he could not crush out my desire of vengeance; that slept, yet could not die.'

'You never gave it up, though the ocean lay between you and your prey?'

'Gave it up? No, that is not in my nature. I knew she would come back; in no land on earth could woman be worshipped as here they worshipped her. Yes, the Sirdar Arthur returned, with more exalted rank, to command, and as the moon follows the sun, she followed him. Years had passed over my head, and changed the rich bloom of my cheeks to hollow pallor, the smile of pleasure to wasting tears. I was poor, and could only hope by dull labor to earn a few wretched days of life. In my misery I went to her, and she pitied me.'

'Her one good trait! I have heard she was tender-hearted to those in want. And you used her pity to injure her?'

'What had that to do with me to disarm my hate? I had no beauty left, yet she was fair and attractive, with her odious freshness; my brow, even in youth, looked brown and haggard by the side of hers. I swore that she should never live to enjoy the Sirdar Arthur's love, having bereft me of mine.'

'You meant to poison her first?'

'Poison her! her! That were poor revenge indeed, to kill her so quickly! Girl, you know nothing of an Indian's hate, an Indian's cunning in the slow torture of a foe. No; misery, slow and lingering, was the true requital for my wrong: I knew how to work it out upon her.'

'You lived with her, in her confidence, for months—nay, years.'

'I did: my design could only be matured with the help of time. To make her hated by those she loved, and who loved her; to expose her to the eye of all the

world, a dishonored remnant of her former self, stripped of all her fair seeming, as your Feringhee sirdars stripped and exposed the naked dead bodies of the princes of Delhi—to do this to her, still living, was my heart's desire.'

'And her own folly, or guilt, laid her open to your designs?'

'Her guilt, her folly, or her love! The woman's inner life was a miserable story, through all the splendour and renown of its outward show. The Sirdar Arthur had disappointed her passion before I became her companion. She pursued him with solicitations to return; he had suffered enough, and kept away: even then, in her despair, she strove to bring him back, losing all prudence, all shame, so that at last her husband was blind no longer. He summoned her to attend him at the Maharajah's court, where his duties detained him so long that she might forget at Calcutta she had a husband still. She obeyed him with much reluctance, and undertook the long and dangerous journey:

they met in coldness and fear, as husband and wife no longer, save for appearance' sake. Sir John Hope Trevor took care to guard his wife's good name; but for herself, he kept away from her as from a shamed and accursed thing! And this secret they committed to my keeping: as all others believed, their usual way of life went on.'

'She loved another man—was she not glad to be freed from her husband's claims?'

'Not to live with him, and see her beauty despised: that was more than woman and wife could bear, or should have been so. I took it that it was—and therefore the English Sirdar grew feeble and sickly, languishing with a strange disease. It might be the love that he repressed for very shame was wasting him before his time to sink beneath nature's gradual decay.'

'He was not very old.'

'He had lived too long for his wife's purposes, not long enough for mine: he

died suddenly at the last. I meant his languor to endure for more months, until all witnesses about the house should see his wife's hand in the cup of doom.'

For a moment, the evil thought thus suggested possessed me too, as to the motive of a rival against whom I and the Indian dancer were united together with such strong hatred. As I caught at her suspicion, this question escaped me:

'She knew what you did? She took part in the murderous design?'

'No, I will not say that of her; she only grew kinder to me, when all else forsook her; if she was an accomplice, it was not with her own deliberate will, only so far as I drew her in, the better to share the consequence with me. No; she did not consent to her husband's death, but her danger consented for her; she could be saved from discovery by no other means, impetuous as her passions were in love or hate. So she thought, and prayed for his death; I thought otherwise, and to her ruin fulfilled her vow.'

'And have you no remorse now, having had no pity then for her who trusted you?'

'Yes, yes! you touch me there, and, therefore I am forced to tell you all, by some strong compulsion I can neither account for nor resist. I did not bear through my terrible purpose alone; I had a powerful friend at hand—the Maharajah, who resented Sir John Hope Trevor's prolonged usurpation of his royal authority. All British rights were upheld with too high a hand by the resolute old Sirdar, until others besides his wife concluded that he had lived too long. Yes; he made the Maharajah his enemy, to help and strengthen my hand.'

'So it was believed at the time; and yet the Commission who tried the case, by implication acquitted the Prince.'

'Oh, ay! They would ask for proofs! Does the bird of the air leave traces of its flight? Do the fishes make footprints in the sea? What proof against a prince would you wring out of his slaves, used to live in fear of him and keep silence, lest he

crush them like worms beneath the trampling feet of his elephants? Proof, indeed! We Indians know our enemy with the true instinct of hate; with us to suspect is to condemn, to torture, to kill! Your great sahibs have done well at last. Yes, they have taken the rule into their own hands, deprived the Maharajah of his raj, deposed him from the musnud: Britons for once are just in their revenge. True it is, that I could never have compassed Sir John Hope Trevor's death but for him.'

'It is thought that the crime was committed through his servants, in complicity with those of Sir John.'

'They were fools who thought that: no one in Sir John's house was acquainted with the cause of his disease, excepting me. It had gone on for more than a year; the Sirdar was a strong man, it was hard to make him die. But the end came, and took me unprepared at the last; not so the Maharajah, who tempered himself the mortal drug I mixed in my master's sherbet before he died. All was provided for my

flight; the Maharajah knew I was but the hand that moved according to his will.'

'Give me proof of this, that others as well as I may believe what you have said to be the truth.'

'I will give you the poison used, what I have left of it. I kept it for my own lips, if ever I should need a quick death, as my last refuge from the punishment I have earned. Yes, you may have it now, I am safe; there is none who can touch me here.'

She drew a tiny bottle from the close bodice that covered her bosom, leaving the smooth dark skin bare about the waist —a scent-bottle, such as is used for attar of rose or some precious essence; she put it into my hand with a cold pressure of her own.

'Remember,' she pursued, 'I give you this of my own free will: no earthly power could constrain me to the act. Take care of it; every drop contains a swift death for one soul of man or woman to taste of.

It is your own, not mine : the use of it be upon your own head! Begone!'

Not another word passed the lips of either while I took it, and turned my face away from her, back towards the path I had travelled so far, to return with those few fatal drops to my gain.

CHAPTER VII.

WHO EVER STROVE—

'I will try the forces
Of these thy compounds on such creatures as
We count not worth the hanging, (but none human)
To try the vigor of them, and apply
Allayments to their act; and by them gather
Their several virtues and effects.'

'Your highness
Shall from this practice but make hard your heart.'

Cymbeline.

My absence having been prolonged beyond reasonable calculation, I arrived in Calcutta, to find my own reported death the last sensation in Anglo-Indian society, minute and circumstantial details of the indignities and tortures undergone (previous to the final happy despatch) by poor little me,

having adorned the local journals for the fortnight preceding my reappearance *in propriâ personâ* on the scene of my lugubrious celebrity. Lady Cameron welcomed me with paroxysms of hysterics, brought on by the shock I gave to her fine sense of the fitness of things, by emerging as a living woman from my reputed tomb in the vultures' stomachs. Evidently, my dearest friends thought it a most unseemly act in the 'lean abhorred monster' Death, to reject so choice a morsel from within his dainty jaws, which doubtless were enough gorged with the best blood of England's sons and daughters, so that he could afford to sniff with the nostril of disdain at a wee bit lassie like me.

My immunity from destruction proved, to the dissatisfaction of all friendly prophets and advisers before the fact, I met my only warm welcome back to civilised life from my enemy, Lady Diana Hope Trevor. She was the first person I sought of my proper will, having brought with me the fatal gift which was to be tested for her

justification from guilt; to what effect it should be used at last, was far from me to foresee. I found her engaged in desperate search of the true cause of her husband's mortal disease, surrounded by a hideous museum of dead animals preserved in spirits to show the various effects produced upon their bodies by experiments of lingering torture. I almost fainted at the sight, my nerves being already shaken by what I could not help seeing as I passed through the garden of the compound up to Lady Diana's door. One corner, fenced off as a menagerie of wretched animals, divided in separate dens or cages, according to their species and size—deer, antelopes, dogs, cats, rabbits, and, carefully shut off from the rest, a collection of venomous snakes. These last only seemed in good case; all the rest showed signs of disease and suffering, some more, some less, as if they were graduating through various stages of misery before death should be allowed to put them out of pain. I thought of these, and my eyes searched round the room, as it were,

for an explanation of such horrors, while Lady Diana in her eager haste was questioning and urging me for possession of the ghastly treasure I clasped within my palm.

'What do you want to do with it?' I said. 'What is the meaning of these wretched spectacles that fill every place about your house?'

'You cannot bear to look at them, that I see, neither could I once; but to justify and save myself, what means dare I reject? These are preparations of the bodies of animals that have been experimented upon by every kind of poison known in India; whether of herb or tree or root upon the ground, or of tooth or fang of venomous beast or serpent—all have been tried, from the cobra's bite to the small flower that distils but one drop of its deadly essence to destroy a life. But all have failed to reproduce the symptoms of my husband's disease and death! Baffled so far, it was my own idea to preserve the bodies, and see what result might be proved by time

and comparison of many examples with one another—if the true agent of my husband's death could be discovered.'

'Which I have brought you here. Have you already discovered it for yourself?'

'I have discovered nothing; they tell me here I never shall, that all experiment is useless, when performed on lower animals merely: to come to the truth, there should be a human subject to work upon.'

'A human life to sacrifice?'

'You have said it!' she cried, catching at my words. 'Oh, if we could but have that, there should be no more doubt as to what death my husband died; thus only would means be found to fix the act upon the true criminal, and I—I should go free and happy, back into the world again! This, this; or if not, it is better for me to die than to live, untried and yet condemned!'

There shone a light in her eyes as she spoke, that was not hope, but some false reflection of a bliss never to be possessed, yet ever to be dreamed of, while her life should last—a mirage, such as the doomed

victims at Cawnpore could see from their last entrenchment, as of troops of armed men beneath the banners of England marching forward to their rescue; an army of clond and haze, that melted away before the day, rising bright and clear upon those pale resolute faces, set to meet their death. When the deep well, that entombed their bodies, dead and dying mingled together, had been closed upon its ghastly load, there came avengers from Britain, strong men and brave, too late to do aught but bow down their heads and weep over the women and little ones embedded in that bloody slaughter-heap. As their case was, so might it be with her, that she should be justified dead who could never be acquitted living. Her eyes glared upon me with the fixed horror of a purpose too terrible to utter. I felt instinctively that she who had brought herself to look calmly upon the agonies of dumb creatures, for the mere chance of producing the symptoms she needed to discover, would not be woman enough to hold her hand, if the human

victim she required to test the poison I had brought, were unhappily placed in her power.

'Lady Diana,' I said, 'you can gain nothing by such means as you have used, but the condemnation of God and man: you could not do it, if you only realised the hatred you are drawing upon yourself, in this country where all life is esteemed a holy thing, the special gift of Heaven to every creature.'

'Ah, your Hindoo worship of animals! they make idols of cows, and believe the souls of their grandfathers and grandmothers walk about in antelopes and monkeys. I don't pretend to understand them: you are half a Hindoo yourself, it is quite natural for you to be alarmed at such sights as I have had to accustom myself to see about me every day: but I assure you, there is nothing to be afraid of here: we use every precaution, and not a single accident has happened—not a bite or a scratch to draw blood from anybody's hand.'

'Is that all you can say? True, Lady Diana, I never could understand such

apathy to any creature's pain—and in a woman, too.'

'You cannot tell what a woman may come to, whose love and life are set upon one cast—whether one thing be true or false: and to find the actual proof of this, I would not spare to stake my soul. Why should I waste tears on pity, when none have any pity for me?'

'I have, if you repent. It is more wretched to be hardened thus, than to be wronged and have no redress. Better to be your victim than yourself, Lady Diana! God defend me from resembling either!'

'You bitter thing! I was like you once, tender and loving to every living creature: I hate all alike now—hate even Arthur as my curse. He doubts me still. What am I to do now to prove how this poison works, which you say the girl Ouda administered to kill my husband? How is this to be tested upon some other, so that the symptoms may be produced to correspond with his? How am I otherwise before the world to be justified?'

'What do you mean? Would you sacrifice another life?'

'Another? A thousand if it must be, if by no other means I can prove that I was guiltless then.'

'What! Whom do you propose to sacrifice? whose life— ?'

'My own, girl, if it must be: what else have I to do with my life, but to bring Arthur back to me before I die?'

'You think to bring him back? you dream of finding the means from me? Lady Diana, have you lived so long, and do you still believe the world was made for you alone, and I of all others, to be your slave merely?'

'I do not, I was mad to say it; I know not what I am saying. How is this poison to be tested so as to prove to the world that this story about Ouda is the whole truth concerning Sir John's death? What good are these drops of poison, if I must keep them lying in my hand?'

'On whom would you use them?'

'Why, on the girl herself, Ouda, if that

could be. Where can she be found even to give her testimony—to be compelled to do it? No, that is the mockery of justice: she would be cautioned to give no evidence against herself if we had her here: and how is she to be brought here? Have you any means of finding her again?'

I was silenced. No, it was certain that I had not, the Indian dancer had securely defied me; she could remove from one temple to another, and so wander in safe concealment to the farthest corner of the land. To search for her would be indeed labor in vain, and as fruitless as attempting to pick out a lost grain among the ocean sands. No, this should remain undone, without which all I had accomplished was as nothing. Yet I grasped at another vision, saying:

'It may be hopeless my discovering her myself, but my kinsmen, who have helped me so far, will surely not mock me with a useless boon. Give me back the poison; it is useless, or worse than useless in your hands. My uncle Jwala Sing can prove

Azeezun's story to be true or false, I doubt not; and either way, with such a monster beneath your roof at the time of your husband's death, justice will exonerate you of any guilty knowledge of what she has done. More than this, you cannot hope through me.'

'No, but through myself I can, and no other will I trust. This poison is mine, to do with it what I will.'

'To do with it what you will? Some evil to yourself or others, I know, or why should you not give it up otherwise?'

'I will never give it up—never to you. Is it not enough for me, that your folly yielded up the clue when you held it fast in your hands? Why did you let Ouda go?'

'Could I keep her by main force? You forget, Lady Diana, that my strength compared to yours, is as a child's.'

'I forget that you are a born fool—that I was worse than a fool to hope for any good from you. I may drown myself in a flood, but I could break you as I drown, like a

straw in my hand. No matter, I have got the poison. Begone with you!'

And with such thanks for my pains, I was fain to take myself away from my rival's sight—a woman foiled, having stooped to her in vain.

CHAPTER VIII.

TO PROVE HER MERIT—

THIS interview between me and Lady Diana, ineffectual in itself, was the theme of countless speculation and discussion without and among the 'ditchers' or denizens of Calcutta. A further push was thus given to the current of public opinion, already set in a direction adverse to the Maharajah as to the poisoning of Sir John Hope Trevor. It was generally recognised that the deposition of that intriguing Prince was a measure of high justice in any case. Certainly, the English General had been murdered; presumably the assassin was a native of India; and whether the right person had been

punished or not, it would be a less evil than an individual should suffer wrong, that such a crime should either pass with impunity, or the governing powers be proved to have made a mistake in their judgment: furthermore, by decree of the 'vehmgericht' of public opinion, Lady Diana and Arthur were bound over to keep henceforward apart from one another.

Rumors were afloat of a new trial, to 'chalan' or transmit the case to another court. I again sought my uncle, to set barren results before his experienced wisdom; to consult him specially upon one point, not made known to the world—the possession by Lady Diana of the poison given to me by the Indian dancer.

'Let the past rest,' he answered me, when I had done my tale; 'you have put it out of your power to do anything more, by giving up the poison; you cannot help it now.'

There was contempt in his tone of pity: though he did not call me fool, he made me feel my folly keenly.

'I should not have let it quit my hand, that is too true—but will you not help me for my mother's sake? Let Arthur hear the whole truth from me. I cannot go to him, but you can for me: he will trust what you say.'

'Your mother's daughter asks too much. You have seen my son, whose sin was less than hers; have I spared him? No: she defiled caste by wedlock with your father. I will have no hand in any union of yours with a European: we part for ever from this hour, unless you choose to come home to me, and devote yourself to the gods of your country and kindred, if perchance they may be propitiated by that to forget the sin of your birth.'

He shook his spotless robe from my beseeching grasp, with a twitch of his small hands, whose likeness had descended to me. There was a fierce energy in that delicate, slight-built form, not unworthy of the comrade of Runjeet Singh, the old 'Lion of Lahore,' who, like my uncle, bore in a body small and spare the spirit of the

royal beast by whose name, 'Singh,' the lion, he was distinguished as the agnomen of his warlike house: now meekly borne, with the hereditary honors of a departed kingdom, by the Christian Maharajah Duleep Singh. I, too, like that young and enthusiastic Prince, had forsaken my people and their idols, to cling only to that everlasting Father and Prince of Peace whose greatest name is Love.

To Him I had been taught to pray for help in the dim past of early childhood. I scarce know how or of whom I had learned this lesson, which my hot heedless youth had half forgotten. In my later straits it had come back to me with a double power, for that I knew my beloved one was a man of prayer no less than a chief of war. The memory of Arthur nerved me to defy with quiet resolution the narrow prejudice and cruel law of caste by which every thought and act of my kinsman's life was so shaped and guided, that he seemed more like a mollusc built within a reef in the sea than a sentient re-

sponsible being, bound to me by close ties of blood, yet of whom I might seek kindness as of a stone.

'My uncle,' I said, 'you cannot now make me other than my father left me, an English Christian child. If you refuse to help me, our God will not refuse, and one thing must be done: from my own lips Arthur must hear all I have done, and know how the poison, which was the means of his justification, was taken from me, and with him it must rest to decide whether any more should be done, or whether, as it was broken off, this miserable story must be left to sink into oblivion.'

'Is such interference consistent with your honor as a woman, even by the strange customs to which Europeans conform?'

'With your countenance as my next kinsman—my only near kinsman in the world—I am safe from malice in doing this that I must do. If you leave me to act alone and unaided, then I shall lay myself open to every false charge that

calumny can invent; but this shall not vary by one line the course I must follow to the bitter end.'

'The spirit that was fatal to your mother! The like desperate resolution, and in as slight a thing; the same, the very same! Well, I will be different from what I was: the old must learn of the young, and the cold ashes of death must be taught to rest in strange places, since the empire of the earth is gone over to the pale-faces, and the gods have departed out of heaven. If caste be defiled, let the soul perish with the body! As a stranger and a European, I ask you what mean you to do, and in what must I be helpful to that?'

'I must see the great Sahib Arthur, with you, uncle, as my guide into his presence, as my protector there.'

'Is that all? you will but come and go beneath his roof? You know there would be dishonor in remaining there?'

'It is impossible that I should risk a doubt in his mind. My love is nobler than could bear suspicion. I will say what

I must as briefly as I can, and then—it may be that on earth we shall never meet again.'

I sank down with a burst of passionate anguish, that moved compassion in the hard heart that had turned so coldly from me. Cry after cry wrung my bosom, while the hot rain of tears burnt my cheek; a tempest of woman's woe, such as man can scarcely bear to look upon, though he lack the passions of his kind, through hard custom congealing the marrow of humanity to frozen clay.

'Hush! hush! This is an odious sight to me. Why should you make yourself a spectacle to be mocked at by passers-by? You should be locked in a zenana if you forget all decency like this. 'Tis but folly to show such weakness to me. I am ready to do as you desire; you shall see Arthur, and with me—and now *rukhsat.*'

Thus courteously dismissed, I withdrew from a scene which was becoming too painful to both, confident of success in my chief object, which, at least, my kinsman

had not denied me. I was not deceived: ere many days, the desired interview with Arthur was arranged between him and my uncle, who was content to suffer my presence on the occasion, as a needful witness for my own behoof, but he impressed upon me the propriety and wisdom of leaving the chief part in the conference to him, and only answering for myself when questioned. On the day appointed, we were ushered with much ceremony through a little army of attendants and officials, into a retired morning-room, the only one in his state residence which Arthur could call his own, even partially, so far as swarming servants and intrusive visitors would permit. It communicated with his private study—a circumstance unknown to me at the time, but not without moment afterwards. It was cool and airy, having lofty height, and pillars draped with curtains up to the ceiling to exclude the prying of passers-by through the ever-open doors, as Indian custom is fain to respect no privacy. On our entrance these were

disturbed by unwonted shutting, with a creaking of hinges and rustling of silken portières, protesting their infrequency of use. After all had been closed from without, and silence made secure, the curtain before the inner door of communication was lifted by an embroidered sleeve, and in the twinkling of an eye my beloved one stood before me.

I dared not raise my veil, or lift up my eyes to look upon him. Small as was the love between me and my kinsman, I stood abashed, shamed by the cold and perfect hate I knew he bore to the usurping, impure European race, to which I was joined by my heart's passion even more than by my father's blood. Nevertheless, despite natural hate in battle with the love he knew I bore my country's foe, my uncle dealt honestly between us two—repeating every circumstance about the discovery of the poison, and its present possession by Lady Diana Hope Trevor, word for word as he had it from my own lips, adding on his own part, in the way of caution :

'Such deeds are done in India by the trampled slave to his oppressor, by the weaker to the stronger foe. A murder is committed, and the dead body laid at your door in the night, to convict you in the morning—not of the wrong you have done and forgotten, having escaped unpunished at the time, but of that your victim's vengeance would impute to you, so that through his act your apparent guilt may bring atonement for what was done by you in secret, and suffered by him without redress. Think you, then, how much hatred the English Sirdar's wife may have earned for herself among our people: how much you, Lord Sahib, have added to your own account while you were marching from city to city, to crush revolt by treading out men's blood like wine. Think whether between you both you have earned enough vengeance to give cause for such a plot as is imputed to a daughter of the land, justly or unjustly, and if so, I, Jwala Singh, will not deny my help to you that the truth may be brought to light, and your innocence

be made certain, if guilt which you deserve not has been laid upon you.'

Addressing his reply to my kinsman with courteous scorn, while his eyes and brow bent towards where I sat, with a touch of old kindness, Arthur said calmly:

'I am much indebted to you, Jwala Singh; I know what such an offer means from you, but no, thanks, I do not intend ever again to stir this controversy; let it sink like the dead in the muddy pools of Ganges river, where your people delight to die and be buried. I have lived through the worst that malice could invent against me: my actions are my answer to my enemies.'

'The Indian dancer's poison will remain; you have not that in safe keeping in your own hands, as Englishmen boast they hold their honor.'

'The infamous drug has done its work, it is now in the hands of an English lady; I shall observe due caution in the matter, both for her sake and my own. I am sorry she ever came or was summoned as a

witness; she could not do us any good, and only put herself to useless pain. We will say no more about her now.'

There was an implied command in his suppression of the theme; he would not declare her innocence, nor yet admit the possibility of her guilt. That he believed much evil of her still was plain enough to my eye. He should know best, or else the woman had sunk her dignity too far by overmuch subserviency to the man, and so earned his harsh judgment—a warning to me if I had needed one. I was silent, and kept my distant reserve unbroken, till Arthur turned towards where I sat, and spoke to me.

'It may interest you to hear, Miss Fortescue, that Lady Diana returns to England in two months. I think those happy who are free to direct their own movements, as you yourself may be. I dare say you will choose to return home.'

'Well—yes—I suppose I must,' was my reply, subdued to utter helplessness. 'You wish me to go back?'

'I wish it for your own sake. I am here for years to come, but wish that I could follow in the next ship. I have no pleasure nor advantage to gain here, only hard duty to satisfy. One memory only will remain to me as a treasure of your land, Jwala Singh; the memory of what this lady, your niece, has so nobly done for the honor of our British name, and all that she has braved through friendship for me. Do not urge me to forget—that is as far from my power as to repay such true devotion.'

None of us had more to say, each of the three being a restraint upon one of the others, so the interview was closed by Arthur with a pressure of my hand—the mute appeal of love whose eloquent silence can only vibrate from heart to heart, to others' eyes betraying nothing. It was enough for me: I knew that I possessed his love—vain and useless as that possession must ever be in my worldly lot, but to my soul's peace that dear assurance was all in all. Must I indeed return to England

upon the hint that Arthur had given me of his desire that I should do so? I came back to Lady Cameron, in much perplexity as to the course I should take, and found her, to my utter astonishment, with mind made up for speedy departure homeward; the mail just come in had brought her news of good grounds for a divorce against her recalcitrant young husband, and she was clamoring for me to join in setting our house in marching order, and decamping for the most desirable steamer upon the overland line.

So my course was shaping itself for me. Oh, inexorable fate!

CHAPTER IX.

THAT DID MISS HER LOVE?

THOUGH Arthur had decided to spare my peace from stings of gossip's tongues—for this I suspected was his true motive in refusing to avail himself of my evidence upon a new trial—though he dealt tenderly with the love he felt bound to reject, yet did the world not so. This last interview, although authorised by the presence of my next maternal kinsman, made me the 'talk of Calcutta,' after the most dubious and unpleasant fashion of attaining to that unenviable point of conspicuousness.

The question was fast settling itself for me as to my going back to England; 'needs must' was drawing me in, on what-

ever side I turned to avoid the undesired consummation of setting forward.

While still at odds with the inevitable, I was startled from my propriety, in common with the whole fabric of Calcutta society, by the announcement of a ball to be given by Arthur at his official residence, to the higher powers bearing sway over India—military chiefs, civil magnates, and native princes, 'loyal and independent;' all of whom were to be propitiated, it was whispered, by a festival given upon a scale of splendor hitherto unknown in the Anglo-Indian annals: a parallel rather to the feasts pictured by the Oriental imagination in story or song, or, not to put too fine a point upon it, 'a sop to Cerberus,' as personified by the three 'powers that be' heretofore enumerated. What concerned me most was, Lady Cameron and myself were invited, while I knew for certain that Lady Diana's name was omitted from the list, as it might be without offence, on the plea that her first year of widowhood was yet unexpired.

My hands trembled to the finger-tips while I entwined my hair with a bright wreath of flowers, bound together by the few rich gems of my mother's still left me. I fastened her portrait over the beating of my heart, that the solemn memory of the dead might bid the tumult of passion there be still—alas, in vain! This was to be my last sight of him I loved, and then he too should be to me but a memory of the dead and buried past—divided from me by a wider gulf than that set between me and my mother by the tomb long closed upon her face; and yet I felt this love could suffer no change, which was prompting me to look the fairer in his eyes, because I knew that to win my heart's desire and sweet hope, all love and beauty in me were vain.

One glance only amid the brilliant crowd could he spare for me, as he stood with the air and dignity of a king, dispensing to every guest a gracious welcome, according to the desert of each. My part was small in the world's comedy, and for my sake,

he dared not overstep the strict bounds of common courtesy, but even in that one look his eye told me it was meant for more. A mad hope seized me that we might meet at some happy moment during that night of festivity, when, in some chosen retirement, apart from the general observation, he might steal a kiss, a pressure of the hand, at least allay my anguish with a few of those sweet words of his, that could nerve me to bear the worst extremity of mortal pain. Only to escape from Lady Cameron, I accepted an invitation to dance, and then, on the plea of heat, led away my partner to that retired room, known to me by instinct, where my last interview with Arthur had been.

It was opened to the company on this gala night; the curtained partition between it and Arthur's private chamber being shut off by stands of flowers to secure the privacy of that apartment. However, I found the crowd had not yet reached it, so that I took possession of it as a retreat for my weariness, and, after my partner had

fetched me ice, sherbet, and other restoratives, begged of him to leave me to recover myself, which at last he did, while I set down his dainties untasted. He had not gone many minutes when a low rustle of silk and lace caused me to snatch my hand from my head that leaned upon it, and I saw passing within two yards of me the sweeping folds of black velvet and miniver, draped with snowy crape, that indicated the grand lines of that matchless form, whose beauty I abhorred with a rival's despairing hate. She came alone towards the very spot where I shrank out of sight as she approached, concealing myself in the thick curtain that hung before the pillars; as if my genius quailed beneath the power of hers, I sat motionless, while looking on till I saw Arthur standing by her side.

Neither of them was aware of any witness, so wrapt were they both in the issue of that hour. I could not choose but hear his agitated whispers pressing her to depart,

'For your own sake, Diana, I thought to have spared us both such a meeting as this—such a handle to the malice of the world.'

'The world has condemned me, as you have done in your own heart; you cannot deny it. You treat me as a criminal to be screened, not as an honorable woman to be justified.'

'I have treated you with every honor, as a lady deeply to be pitied.'

'Pitied! Scorned, you mean!'

'No; but, as a widow in your first year of mourning, there was every excuse for your absence.'

'Perhaps so; but not for the public affront you put upon me, of erasing my name from the list to be invited. Yes, you did that with your own hand.'

'Diana, I was compelled; believe me, you should not have come.'

'I might not, if I had not been shamefully excluded, have forced myself in amongst your guests against your will, but there was no other way to conceal the

insult, so I chose to carry my point with a high hand.'

'You have done so, Lady Diana, and I have asked your pardon for the slight I could not avoid. You might have spared us both all this pain and contention if you had listened to me in time, when I implored you to return to England.'

'Yes, that you might pursue your game unfettered here! I know you, what you are! The would-be conqueror of the little Fortescue's virtue. I do not mean her husband; oh no! she is better than I am, but not good enough to be thought of in an honorable way.'

I was indignant that he did not defend me, but she spared him the need.

'If she loved you as I love, she would have yielded long ere this, and you would have thrown her off already. What is such a love as hers to my frenzy, who am mad enough to take you on any terms—I must before I die——'

'Hush, hush! we may be overheard; there is a couple just passing there beyond.'

'Come in, then, away from them; no one will disturb us here.' Her voice fell, as the two stole behind the pyramid of shrubs and flowers, and lifting the purdah or portière, passed into Arthur's private room together. I heard a murmur of hushed whispers; an uncontrollable impulse seized me to peer through the silken folds that parted us, in guarded silence, if their interview led to mere foolish words, but ready to startle their security by my cry of pain, if he should prove less than true to himself, or if she, his evil genius, failing to betray him into any weakness unworthy of his nobler nature, should aim revenge for her passion foiled against his very life. Of such extremity I believed this modern Phædra not incapable, as I lay listening there.

I glided noiselessly along the carpeted floor, until my eye pierced from beneath the curtain to the very spot they occupied; he standing in an attitude of constraint; she kneeling at his feet like a slave before her master. The blood rose to my face

with shame at such abject meanness in the shape of woman. A turn of her head and arm showed me what she was doing; one of Arthur's feet was set upon a sheet of white paper, the same which had been wrapped around her bouquet, now flung upon the floor; with the small pencil attached to her ball programme she was tracing upon the paper the outline of his foot as it touched the ground. I knew it well, small and beautifully shaped as a woman's; contrasting with his height, and the light strength of his muscular frame, it completed him in the perfection of manly symmetry and grace. I saw she was flattering him upon this, working to foster the grain of vanity that lies latent in man.

'You must leave me something of you,' she moaned low to herself. 'This is little enough, and a poor return from a man for all a woman has to sacrifice—her love, her peace, her place before the world. I shall keep it well till death—it is all I have left of you. Stay, I must draw the line of the

instep by my eye; this tracing only bears the print of your dear foot, it shows where the arch rises beneath. See, I can lay my whole hand under your foot without your pressing my fingers, Stand still, I am going to draw the instep now. What a grand beautiful creature! such a foot and such a hand were never seen in a man. Something I must have of you, why, why not all?'

She crept closer to him, clasping the hand so warmly praised, with a rain of kisses, low and passionate, yet not unheard by the trembling witness in my bosom: the heart leapt to my lips as he gently disengaged his hand, and she, not to be restrained by such mild dissuasion, sprang up and threw herself around him, in her motion swift as lightning, as the beautiful cobra bearing death in its lips. Her moan went on:

'Let me dream of it, though never to be —let me dream that I am happy, oh, but one more moment before you cast me away from you to die. I did dream of you

all last night—that you were all my own, that we were one for ever—oh! why, why can it not be?'

"Lady Diana, you know that it never can be now, with honor to us both. We cannot marry. God forbid that I should abuse your love and affection to bring you to disgrace—you should know me better; I have too true a respect for you to be capable of such baseness. Diana, it is best for us to part now and for ever.'

'No, never! You put me off with such excuses because you have no longer any love for me. You forsake me, and I must die—you know well I cannot live apart from you, and you want to kill me, and be rid of me so.'

'Come away, and don't talk so foolishly—you cannot think so vilely of me. Come away, for your own reputation's sake; we shall be missed, remarked upon—come.'

He almost dragged her back into the antechamber, where I had left my untasted goblet of sherbet. I continued to watch, twisting myself amidst the curtains; I saw

her snatch up the drink I had left, and after her fingers had worked over it for a moment, she tasted and put it down ; then, with a strange look, she turned to Arthur, saying :

'I will not live to be a burden to you ; I cannot live alone without your love—*our* love of early youth. I shall die, but you will not live long after me, I know it well.'

Again she sipped at the cup, fixing her eyes upon him with that strange earnest expression I never before saw worn by a human countenance—tender and mournful as the soft flash of pale crimson light that heralds the fierce thunder amidst the hills of storm. In its beauty was the menace of swift death soon to come.

'Oh, how delicious this is,' she murmured, tasting again. 'Let us drink the rest of it together.'

She lifted the goblet to his lips, while she bade him drink, and he obeyed. Nerved by burning jealousy, I rushed from my concealment, and with one turn of my slight wrist dashed it to the ground, shiver-

ing the glass, and spilling the pernicious sweetness that tempted him to his death.

'She here! that wretched girl! What brought her? How could she know?' cried my rival, dismayed, but not disarmed of her insatiable rancor against me. 'You are too late; what I sought to do I have done. Arthur is mine—mine only, and for ever. I care not who may hear me say so now. Can the world's mock do any more hurt to those about to die?'

'To die! What does she mean?' I cried, sickening with fear, as I lifted my pale face towards the blanched cheek of my love. 'Arthur, speak to me; you are not going to die?'

'Who desires to separate us in our death?' fell hoarsely on my ear from the quivering lips of my cruel foe. 'Girl, you are striving with me in vain; the bond of love is stronger between us two than any mortal power can break. Let go your feeble hand upon the fate you can only provoke to your own hurt, not turn aside to change one act of either of us two. Yes,

we will die together, if we may not be suffered to live for each other any longer.'

'Lady Diana,' said Arthur, interposing with that gentle firmness of his that would compel the fury in any woman to yield to his strong persuasion; 'dear friend, you wring my heart, upon my soul you do! by such talk of dying. Remember, I cannot afford to lose you yet; though far apart, we can still feel tenderly for each other, and hear good news from time to time, until we live down this trouble, and can meet again. Do not despair of me; I can do better than throw away my life. India can hardly spare me yet, nor can my heart spare you to die.'

It was very bitter to me, but I listened, constraining the rebel in my breast, as she broke forth anew:

'You cannot spare me to die? Then die with me! What should I fear now more than I feared that time you rescued me from Nana Sahib's power? And when there was danger that we might be re-captured together, I was the braver of the

two; 'twas I who bade you then fear nothing, while you had a sword to pierce me through the heart, that I might perish unsullied, rather than live to suffer shame. You were ready then to throw your own life freely down, as a trifle compared with my safety: why should you grudge to yield it now, as I do mine, in a mutual sacrifice to each other?'

'Oh, this is too horrible!' I cried, a presentiment breaking in upon me, which with all the strength of my reason I battled to shut out: 'he has not borne you so bravely through so much to turn coward now: why would you have him kill himself, and murder you?'

'Not he, but I, I—what I have done I have done,' she cried aloud, past heed of who might hear. My heart misgave me; I cried out too:

'What do you mean? that drink—you would have murdered him—but I dashed it to the ground, thank God, thank God!'

'Too late,' she hissed in my ear, as I fell upon my knees, seizing me by the

shoulder: 'he has received his death into his bosom, as I have mine, in that drug of the dancing girl's—'twas you gave it me.'

Wildered and amazed, I could find no words. It was Arthur questioned her.

'Do you mean all you say, Diana? Am I indeed to die, and by the act of your own hand?'

'No, no! you must not die, Arthur; I pray to God you may not. You did but taste of the fatal poison I mixed for myself, but not for you. Oh no! I never meant that, even when I was mad enough to give it you.'

'Why did you so? It was cruel treachery, Diana, from you to me.'

'I do not know—I hated you that moment. I had drunk of it just before. I have heard these deadly Indian drugs may make one mad, and thus one turns bitterest in hatred against what one loves the most—as the mad dog bites his master. My husband was poisoned, I know it now, for he grew to hold me in horror and

loathing some time before he died: and I am punished, who had nothing to do with his death. I was growing into a horrible hate for you, that was striving with my love, and so I gave you to drink of the poison too.'

'What dire infatuation possessed you to taste it even?'

'I had no other way to prove the manner of my husband's death, for my own justification; you—even you believed me guilty of participation in the act of murder; so I made the experiment upon myself, because I had no other human subject to work upon—no meaner victim would serve.'

'To bring you to your death, and me with you; it is hard to a man to die in such a cause.'

'No, no; I did not mean that, Arthur; I pray God you may not die: I had rather he left my wretched soul in hell for ever, than took your precious live through me—no; you will live, you may recover yet, and be happy when I am dead. You did

but taste the drink; I have had several doses of the same drug, and still my life was safe. Why not your's, who barely tasted what I had left to-night, after I drank to death of the poison, which in so small a dose may do no serious harm? Oh, Arthur, forgive, have mercy upon me before I die!'

'I have nothing to forgive you, Diana; I blame myself, who trusted you too far; you I absolve in so much as you have been more cruel to yourself than to me.'

'Oh no, no! I did not mean to kill myself either, I did but play with my own life at first—what was it worth without you, that I should spare it, when I had need to prove what this poison could do? And then, as my health and strength began to fail with repeated doses—then I asked myself, should I die alone, and let you marry the woman who gave the fatal drug to me? It was but a moment's frenzy to make you taste of it—you will not die, no, no, I pray God you shall not—I never meant

that you should die, only that your strength should be enfeebled, your mind depressed.'

'If you mean that I shall live, and not die, tell me the whole truth: how, and to what end? You know I prize life only for what life's work can accomplish, not as mere existence for so many moments or years. I would not choose to die, and leave my task half done, my name the sport of dubious fame, for want of a few days more to make this empire safe and sure, which I have helped to win for England with my blood. Do not deceive me now, Diana; shall I live as I have lived, to die in harness?'

Wild passionate weeping was her only reply, till he pressed her again and again, determined to take no denial or excuse in lieu of the truth he sought. At last the words flowed out slowly, wrung from her like drops of the heart's blood.

'Your, reason may be affected, your brain will surely suffer; you will not be able to

brave the heat of this Indian sun. Go home before you become mad, or all your disposition will be changed, and you will turn against her in hatred—her who brought this cruel drug as a gift of death to me.'

As she ran over the list of hideous possibilities, the heart within my bosom turned to fire, and burned in pain of hell, and great horror and loathing of myself seized upon me. Oh, that I had been patient and done nothing! Why had I thrust my hand rashly into the urn of fate, to bring forth this evil and destroy the man I loved? He listened, without a quiver of nerve or change of countenance, to the tale that blanched my cheek with agony of grief and fear, then only said:

'I hope that I may die rather than live to forget myself. You are very cruel in your mercy, Diana, and most so where you profess to love.'

'Oh, Arthur, to hear you speak to me like that! Oh, take a knife and pierce me

through the heart, but tell me you do forgive me.'

Her exclamations alarmed at last the gay crowd near at hand, and drew them towards the hitherto unnoticed retreat where we three had been playing with life and death. As troops of listeners and gazers pressed in and grouped around us, Lady Diana recovered a little of her high-bred self-possession, and turned with defiant countenance to foil the general curiosity. I alone heard her gasp out below her breath in Arthur's ear: 'I am dying, take me home.'

He only helped to lift her into her carriage, and sent her away in the care of her attendants, making no offer to follow; as he told her then for the last time, they were parted by inexorable honor. And then, with a pride that defied the proudest, he bade his guests a courteous farewell.

I, too, felt that he and I must avoid each other, and the ball breaking up after the scene just enacted, in which I had borne a

part so trying to heart and sense, a farcical comedy 'played in' the morning dawn, troops of men and women hurrying away from their late revelling in every stage of dilapidation to their incongruous disguises called 'fancy dress.' These were the last who delayed over the rich fragments of a sumptuous supper, loth to lose a single pleasure of the appetite. 'Fair women and brave men,' who had adorned those spacious halls, were departed long before the catastrophe in the ante-chamber.

Lady Cameron, who had lost me early in the night, met me with accusing face, and pants of impatience heaving her unveiled charms up and down, in an exuberance of irritated flesh, or rather wax and oil paint —the last make-up employed to preserve her as a Venus, something puffed out with vanity—'beautiful for ever.'

Being questioned too closely for reply or almost endurance as to what had become of me through all those hours, I veiled despair beneath a show of mockery, and

laughed loud at life and joy, and most of all at love, as an evil jest to be taken with the best grace I might from the strong goddess 'Destiny.'

CHAPTER X.

THE BITTERNESS OF DEATH.

MORNING grew into the next day, which brought me no tidings either of the effect of the poisoned sherbet upon Arthur, or of Lady Diana's condition, whether better than when she was borne away at the close of night, or worse. This last could scarcely be, short of the supreme agonies of death. Had this come, I deemed I should have heard something, so I believed she must be still alive. God forgive me if the thought of her end, as inevitable ere many weeks or days, sent through my heart an involuntary thrill of hope! Fatal it ever is to build our trust upon another's fall, and seeking our joy in that, to turn,

heaven's wrath away from our oppressor and our foe, to desire whose death in blind hatred is to be guilty of it in our own treacherous heart.

If rumor without was silent, there was commotion and sore disturbance within doors. Lady Cameron refused to be put to bed in broad daylight, and elected to spend the hot hours of the forenoon in hurrying on our preparations for the homeward journey, there being but ten days to the good before the date appointed for the beginning of that end to all my hopes in this world. With much fussification and implied reproach—I had turned rebellious against direct attacks—she busied herself about every concern of mine that in no way affected her, proclaiming aloud the unpalatable truth, that no one could understand what had come over the girl, *i.e.*, myself; that I had done nothing, absolutely nothing at all to make ready for our start; that unless she bestirred herself, she did actually believe I should go off without a clean thing to put on during the whole

voyage home. Discussion on the point was hot between us, being carried on in loud tones on her side, in silent resistance on mine: and for three days she argued with me thus, to the hindrance of any mending of affairs in the way of serious preparation. In truth, I could turn my hand to nothing; my brain was too much overwrought, busy with sick fancies that worked all thought into a chaos, where one impulse alone made itself felt, a rising up of the whole being in an indescribable revolt against the thing my nature could not bear—this separation from my love at the very point of our lives when the bar between us was breaking down.

On the third evening, a letter was brought in for me, addressed in a hand I failed to recognise, till, impatiently breaking the seal, and looking first at the signature, I saw dimly, as through a mist, the fatal letters of my rival's name. These were clear enough, and so were the few lines she had written to urge my immediate presence beside her death-bed; every word

showed the tremor of her hand in performing what must have been a task of more than death's bitterness. She write to me! She must be humbled to come to that, and I felt the monitor in my bosom curb its rising passion down. I said nothing to anyone, but rose up and went.

I sought admission, and waited for it in vain, while a trembling crowd of white-robed attendants hustled against each other, with the one answer in the mouth of each, as they went in and came back, one after the other, in obedience to my urgent entreaties, 'darwaza band,' or closed door. No other word could be wrung from them as to their Mem Sahib's condition, till I rushed past them and stood at the anteroom portière, beckoning to the European nurse, a Sister of Charity, at her bedside.

Some vague sense of religion, it appeared, had led Lady Diana to seek a remedy for soul sickness in the forms of ceremonial worship, as a substitute for the change of heart and healing of its corruption which

she desired to keep far from her as yet, until she knew the end was at hand, and then wildly cast about for mercy and help to mind and body's disease wherever their blessing might be found. By whatever course the stream of compassion reached her, there was no false zeal in the kneeling black-robed woman who prayed beside that unforgiven sinner, laid helpless upon her bed of despair; no error of creed in the Christian love that soothed her mortal pain with every alleviating touch and change of position that skilled experience taught for succour to the dying; no pious fraud upon the lips that told her truly she could not enter heaven impenitent, or be absolved by the Church itself without atonement, such as was yet within her power, to those she had injured so sorely by her guilty hate and guiltier love—myself and Arthur. His presence would have been a scandal beside that bed of death; mine was altogether innocent, therefore I was bidden there alone to receive amends for both. I looked upon my enemy,

humbled to such a pass, lying helpless, so changed from her former self that I was stirred with feelings I could not have believed myself capable of, so touched with pity was every fibre of my being at her utter misery laid there. The serpent had turned round upon herself, and caught her fang in her own flesh, to writhe in agony unto death of the poison of her proper sting!

I was led by a gentle hand, motioning me to kneel beside that bed of woe, and wait in silence. I saw the sufferer could not speak when first she lifted her eyes to mine. A trembling of great fear seized upon her, and the light coverlid shook with the quivering of her limbs. I knew that the terrors of death were strong upon her. Yes, to a woman like her it was a grievous thing to die. The sister bathed her brow, and wiped her lips, moist with death's clammy dew, until an impatient movement warned off the tender hand, and the words came faintly in pain.

'Leila Fortescue, are you there? I ask

you to forgive me before I die—I have wronged you—do not keep it now against my soul hereafter. I am dying—forgive me.'

'As I would be forgiven, Lady Diana, I pray from my soul you may be forgiven too.'

'I cannot be forgiven without repentance. All that heaven's mercy and yours can do, will be to mitigate the punishment of my sin; it would spare me ages of torture if I could repent, but I cannot wish I had never loved Arthur; I should speak false if I said I could, and neither deceive God nor my own heart. One thing only is bitter to me in death, that I am lost in vain, and have tasted no fruit of joy in my guilt. I have humbled myself, and been scorned by the man I love; Arthur has rejected me, and so I die.'

'You die for him—then I can pity you.'

'I spurn your pity! How dare you, girl, insult my dying agonies? It is all the same for you; he loved me as he can never love again. He was able to resist temptation

which no mortal man who ever lived could have withstood before; this is true, but it will never be believed; I shall die and bury his heart with me.'

'Oh, do not think of that, but repent! Try, pray to feel sorry for the past. Remember, you have robbed me of more than my life; we were almost wedded when you took him away from me; but for you he would have been to me a true and most dear husband.'

'That might be still, if he could live—but he must follow where I am going, and that I have done with my own hand. Oh, God! save him from that.'

'Let us both pray for his life, and your other sins will be light upon your soul—all the rest shall be forgiven you, but his death, never!'

Close upon these words of mine followed a commotion at the doors outside, and my ear caught the sound of Arthur's voice. He had come in pity to the dying woman, with a pardon upon his lips; to repay evil with good, as the messenger of

mercy from heaven. Should he be admitted there to comfort? Upon that bed a human form and mind lay powerless to do or obtain anything of their own desire and motion: a prostrate creature, to be lifted up and laid down, spoken to or let be, according to the will of others, not its own; and with those in authority about that chamber of death—physicians, nurse, and servants, the decision lay. By these Arthur's access was forbidden, though the dying wretch cried out in agony but for one look, one word from him, repeating his name until no articulate sound could pass those cold lips any more, and a low confused babbling of many sounds was all that met the sister's ear, bent to receive those last behests of the parting soul, which the bodily speech fails to convey to those who watch beside it to spell the disjointed syllables which have no fulfilment. One sound I caught as she made effort to speak, 'Gla, gla.' I guessed her desire for a mirror, to look for the last time upon her own face, once so fair.

I had entreated in vain for permission to bring the only comfort that could have soothed the misery of that bed, by admitting Arthur: the doctor replied with decision that the patient's immediate death would follow such disturbance. Arthur was not her blood relation, and there were too many strangers already in the sick room. As to the nurse, she was like all religious persons, and her praying and preaching would hasten the end that medical skill if left alone might postpone for several hours longer. I made small account of the dubious gain, praying inwardly that when my hour should come my death might not be like this, but rather sudden and painless, by the merciful visitation of God, not lingering in prolonged suffering which the touch of a human hand can add to, easier than relieve. There was no one in the room but the sister and myself, when Lady Diana murmured that same sound, often repeated in her ravings, 'Gla, gla, gla.' There being no one to forbid me now, I brought a looking-glass.

and held it up before the face of the dying, whose breath scarce dimmed the surface where the changed features repeated themselves.

Then the hands were lifted up in a motion of horror, as it were to repel something, and I understood that she was content to look no more upon him she had loved: since her beauty had turned to that, it was best for her comfort that he at least should see her face no more. But one comfort she was not past—the prayers of the faithful sister, joined with mine, for pardon to meet her soul even in the extremity of death, until in a few moments she expired.

It was the first time in my life that my eyes met the sight of death, cold and still, in the majesty of solemn peace. I thanked God she had had my forgiveness, and prayed for his divine pardon upon my own sin, if a hope of earthly happiness had stirred my heart through the removal of this trouble from my path: from rejoicing in

the miserable end of this worldly, vain life, O God! deliver me.

All mortal thoughts of love had perished within my heart, dead in my bosom as the clay that was lying there.

CHAPTER XI.

BETROTHED.

Ours, too, the glance none saw beside;
The smile none else might understand;
The whispered thought of hearts allied,
The pressure of the thrilling hand;
The kiss so guiltless and refined,
That love each warmer wish forbore;
Those eyes proclaimed so pure a mind,
Even passion blushed to plead for more.

BYRON.

A MAGNIFICENT funeral, ordered with all the pomp and circumstance of the Roman ritual as used to hallow the memory of the Church's favored child, followed hard upon that awful death, as if in solemn mockery of poor humanity's faint struggles to atone an ill-spent life at the eleventh hour. Lady Diana Hope Trevor, though incapable of receiving any of the seven

sacraments of the Church, had died a Catholic, inasmuch as she had shown a desire so to do, confirmed by the bequest of all the property she could so dispose of towards the advancement of the only true Faith in India; a new and beautiful church being expressly provided for, with an endowment for perpetual masses to be applied to the relief of her own soul in that other world she was so little prepared to enter. For the justification of her memory in this, no pains were spared: an elaborate declaration appeared in her will to protect her innocence, in thought, word, or deed, of all act and part in her husband's death: her sins against Arthur and myself were not touched upon, doubtless that no scandal might spread any further than it had already done concerning the Church's adopted; after her death, charity was fain to cover up with good report the frailties of that soul fled naked, in doubt and darkness, into the land where human judgment may not penetrate to question the doom of a just and merciful God.

No persuasion or threat could have torn me away from India now. The pain of decision, however, was spared me: Lady Cameron was informed, through an official channel, that my presence at Calcutta might be required as a witness upon a new inquiry into the circumstances attending General Hope Trevor's death; the last declaration of his widow, at which I was present, were evidence in law, if she had made any touching upon the facts; whether she had or not, I had the right to keep to myself until summoned before a judicial tribunal, and the bare presumption took me out of Lady Cameron's hands. That lady, therefore, had to look out for another travelling companion to kill time in her society on board the P. and O.; it was her coustant declaration that she had never gone anywhere alone in her life, never could do so; and having failed to secure congenial companionship by taking to herself a partner for life thirty years her junior, she was fain to mend her case by the sacrifice of some female martyr to

her comfort; and on my following the example of her spouse, in eluding the too-fond clutches her self-styled 'affectionate nature' prompted her to lavish upon somebody, she spent one half of the hot season in Calcutta before she could be accommodated with a substitute. All that time I was bound in courtesy to remain under her roof, and listen to her continual complainings against the blazing skies, that she swore would bring her to a shadow. In effect, her bulk of charms was a sinking like the humps of a fasting dromedary, until heaps of flabby skin creased one another where fat had once outspread, and a firm substance no longer filled the high bodices of transparent muslin, in which her delight had been to display even more than the low-cut style of the Second Empire ventured to show.

A suitable victim at length offered herself in guise of an unsuccessful speculation, returned upon the parental hands; a lady, by courtesy called young, and single after three years of husband-hunting in India in the way of serious business, following

upon fifteen London seasons of the same sport by way of amusement.

This blushing aspirant for promotion matrimonal had gone out to India, 'upon her own hook,' tempted, 'maid as she was to venture forth so far,' by Lady Cameron's glowing accounts of the hunting-grounds of connubial bliss in that remote East, where she, in her young days, had been transformed from a buxom abigail to 'my lady,' by entrapping old Sir Duncan Cameron in the enchantments of a slender waist; which, upon her marriage day, her husband could span between both his hands, a mathematical fact of which she used to boast, when the diameter of the same, multiplied by three, gave the circumference as one yard and a quarter only by dint of tightest squeezing. The silly imitator who followed in her wake after forty years' interval found the difference produced by steam and rail and wire as swift as meditation or the thoughts of love, since the time when the gilded eld of Anglo-India were content to be married

and done for in the same place where their riches bred and grew. Disappointed in this last resort, my old friend Miss Cross (for it was no other) put in her claim for compensation from her indiscreet adviser, by whom the same was liquidated to the mutual convenience of dame and demoiselle by joining company for the two months' boredom of the sea voyage, chosen after many pros and cons, for motives of economy, in preference to the short and expensive route overland, while as yet the Suez Canal was not. Thus was I freed from my cumbrous escort, not without embracements of almost stifling demonstrativeness, and slobbering from chin to roots of hair, with an effusion of feminine kisses that made me sick, as I submitted to such an exhibition of cuddling as had never before fallen to my share, from any sort or condition of human kind.

Thus parted friends, our life-currents have flowed separately from that day, nor do I see any channel where they may ever reunite in one stream! therefore, I may

state now, for the behoof of all interested in the fate of both or either bright specimen of womankind, how from that day forth they clung together as tightly as the famous ladies of Llangollen—though perforce, and against their own sweet will.

Lady Cameron, upon her return to England, found sufficient proof ready to hand, through the perseverance of her lawyer, to satisfy both judge and jury, as well as the world at large, of the delinquencies of her juvenile husband, whom she therefore divorced and put away by decree *nisi*, afterwards made absolute in due course. Thus freed from the nuptial tie, she pursued her matrimonial chance for the third time, but without success sufficient to justify her in again parting with her liberty. Miss Cross, less keen of scent than the doughty widow, was fain to join in the eager pursuit. To this day, going all the more merrily on, that matron and maid have enhanced the pleasures of the sport by hunting in couples—a caution to rich old bachelors—

widowers, too wary to be caught, have long been renounced as inassailable game. Left alone in India, without European protection, I was thrown as a burden upon my uncle's charge; Jwala Singh, unable to touch me himself with the tongs of kinship, sent me with a friendly intentioned jerk out of the frying-pan of Western chaperonage into the hotter fire of Oriental seclusion. No one would have to do with such a nondescript as me—*poverina!* A Eurasian family, whose half-blood, in the opposite sense to mine, came through an English mother mated with an Indian Rajah, were prevailed upon to take me into their zenana, where I pined in splendid misery all the long summer through.

My blood was stirred to wild passion of suspense by that glorious sun, whose rays seemed part of my own life-fire—a strength given to every faculty of my being, so that to long and possess not seemed more than I could bear; also, I was miles away from Calcutta, still farther off from Simla, whither Arthur had been

summoned by official routine as the seat of government during the hot season. A dull quiet crept over me, painless at last as the death that comes through mortification within: I had lost the sense of earthly pain with the expectation of joy.

Then came the change in my fate, sudden as the lifting of the cloud curtain after the tropical storm of rain—thus after many days does patience see her long-deferred reward. Like her I sat brooding upon the grave of hope. I was leaning upon a window for some idle moments of rest, while the short gloaming of the tropical evening was melting into the unspeakable glories of Eastern night. It seemed as if my life were passing into eternity, and that nothing more upon God's fair footstool could touch me farther, or hold me back from speeding like the dove, though with bleeding wings, to the far-away home of everlasting rest. I had been taught at last to cease from fear, or from hope, of any chance or change beneath the sun.

There was a sound of voices without;

one whose deep tones reminded me of his, and thrilled me through and through, like the speech of the dead heard in a dream. If it were he! But no; it was impossible that any public or private interest could bring him here. As to his coming in search of me, whom he had so long neglected and forgotten, that, I knew, as I said to myself, could never be. Should he not be dead already, if the poison gift of my rival were true?

I was asking myself this question, and steeling my heart to bear its pains, if his wraith had risen before mortal eyes at the moment of his death, which might come, I knew, at any moment—and I far away from his side. It was a mercy of heaven that permitted him thus to make the great change known to me, whose spirit could never be divided from his, in time, nor in eternity. It flashed upon my recollection in the instant, how the same vision of a distant event had occured to an officer in England, who, during the Mutiny, beheld the semblance of a brother officer then in

India, pale, and covered with blood, stand before him in silence for a few seconds, and then disappear. He noted the time, and discovered, long afterwards, that it corresponded with the very moment when his friend expired of a treacherous wound, so many thousand miles away.

I remembered this story, with a strange clearness of detail. And then I must have lost consciousness; my next memory is of the return of sense. My eyes opened, and met my own image repeated as in two mirrors in those of my own dearest love, Arthur himself, as I lay clasped to his breast. My gaze of wonder and ecstasy was interrupted by his kiss, long, long, and devouring, as the anguish of my life had been, sweet as the bliss of happy death that crowns the holy life. His love drank my whole soul from my lips in that one burning draught. I was lost to myself; no power of will or motion left to resist that delirium of joy.

'My own—all my own now!' he murmured, so low that my ear just caught the

heavenly tones. 'My darling child, you deserve to be happy. Let me devote my life to repay you all the past. Do not deny me now, after you have let me love you. If I were to lose you, Leila, I should die.'

My surprise was mute, while I trembled beneath his kisses, and shrank in his passionate embrace, that held me helpless to escape, so close and fast, that death alone, I knew, would cool its ardor evermore. No answer passed my lips to tell my love; too much already had the passion of my soul laid my heart bare to him.

Then he pressed me to name the day, a fortnight thence, when we should be made one for ever and ever. I was too much overcome to speak of that yet, and his tenderness for me bade him forbear; so gently he took me to his heart, that I grew bold, and gazing on his face, I saw that he was marble pale. A hideous fear, that my full measure of joy had kept out, broke in upon me now, like a torrent of water through a rift:

'That poison she made you drink—

have you felt it since? are you ill — in pain?'

'My darling girl, no; it is not that. And yet, I am far from well. Though I did but taste it, 'twas enough to unfit me for this climate. Had I cared to live for myself only, I should have obeyed the doctors, and returned home. I went to Simla, in search of health, not by routine of custom merely. That last "durbar" we held, the heat was overpowering; I had to sit on horseback several hours, but the sun was overcast—it was not much at the time.'

He passed his hand before his brow, with a vague uncertain motion. Sun-smitten! that was his ailment—less deadly, I prayed to God, than that other which he took from a woman's hand. Not of the sun's fierce rays had he suffered, which I have heard compared to mosquitoes' stings; but the hot light, veiled by clouds, I knew was most deadly in its effect, as a scorpion, to wound and slay. I strove to read his face, and restrain the fears that spoke in mine.

'My duty here is done,' he said, speaking faintly; 'done as long as my strength would serve me. I shall return to England soon, and take my wife home. Some would say I ought not to marry; 'tis but a broken life and shattered frame that I have left to devote to you.'

'Enough for me that your body can still lodge your soul. If your face could grow as black as a coal, it would seem unchanged to me. I will love you so much, that God will pity me, and leave us together. If you are to die, let it be upon my breast, and I will follow you through the gates of death.'

'My own sweet darling!' Other words I will not recall. I was laid upon his bosom, as he sank down, ill and faint, to rest beneath my passionate breathings of love upon his brow, and then we two were blest, as when virgin Eve, before the fall, was brought pure from the hand of God to Adam in Paradise.

CHAPTER XII.

WEDDED.

Du Heilige, rufe dein Kind zurück,
Ich habe genossen das irdische Glück,
Ich habe gelebt und geliebet.—SCHILLER.

OUR happy wedlock was sealed with little more of worldly preparation than that blessed union of the First Pair. In a little mission chapel of a remote corner of the Great Peninsula, I was married to Arthur by a military chaplain, who accompanied him as a friend, apart from official duty. The ceremony was so private, that not six persons beside ourselves could suspect beforehand the solemn nature of the service we held together in the humble Christian temple of the hills. This done, I was to

accompany Arthur as his wife upon his homeward voyage, when he should resume the state of his high place, laid aside during a brief interval for love of me, as if that affection were too sacred to be disturbed, while we hallowed it at the altar's foot, by any feeling of ambition, vanity or pride, such as belongs to this world merely.

Few as they were who knew our secret beforehand, there did not lack warnings and hinted suggestions of evil to come of my rashness in giving myself up to a man whose life was doomed already. The work of poison, I was assured, had yet to develop itself in some unknown form of disease, that might touch the reason, as well as destroy the vigor of the body. His very passion for me might assume the form of cruel violence. I was casting my young life into the jaws of a fierce tiger—a demon who would rend me in the form I loved. Arthur himself, hearing of these things, questioned me again and again, as to whether I was sure I should never re-

pent my choice; for the last time he offered to release me upon the eve of our marriage day; but his danger only drew me the closer to his heart, while I listened to his words of tender care for me.

'Leila, I feel that I have not the right to accept your noble sacrifice. I am leading you into certain peril, just as I might ask you to cross with me one of those rope ladders cast for bridges across the rivers of the Himalayas; a frail footpath hanging hundreds of feet above the boiling gulf of the mountain flood! What if my arm were to fail me when I would hold you up; or worse, were I in a mad moment to give the blow that should hurl you down?'

'Do not say that to me, Arthur: rather suppose that my heart could fail, when half way up the height that leads to heaven. Yes, far among those inaccessible ice-peaks, the children of my race behold the everlasting dwelling place of the Most High, the Great Spirit who is above all gods, the Father of earth and heaven; shall I

look back instead of upward, when you, beloved, are by my side? I have heard of a young wife whose horse reared back upon a precipice in those mountains; her husband grasped the reins and held the horse by the strength of his arm, but the wife fainted and fell, perishing where she might have been safe: think you I should have done so?'

'My noble-hearted darling! I know you could not fear either pain or death with me! We will trust in God. I pray Him to take away my life before I lose the sense of all I owe—of all you should be to me, dearest; to-morrow I shall not have to leave you like this—never more shall we be parted in life or death.'

And with many, many sweet kisses we bade one another for the last time good-night.

Ere many days we bade farewell together to that bright homeland of mine; side by side we sat gazing upon it, far off upon the great waters, until all that was left to our eyes was a vision of palm-trees

rising from the crimson mirror of the sea, until it was night upon the ocean, and we turned to our rest, happy.

Oh God, how happy! We were so much alone together in the great war-ship placed at Arthur's disposal for his voyage of bringing home a bride. Beyond the honor, no state ceremonial was attached to the unconditional favor of his country: and the captain and officers of the man-of-war knew how to surround our honey-moon retirement with the respectful sympathy that never intrudes, yet ever welcomes the bridegroom's presence, whenever he has need to vent the joy of a full heart among friends true and leal. The youngest sailor-boy would touch his cap and stand aside whenever I and Arthur paced the deck arm-in-arm, or leaned over the side to peer into the rush of waters by the great ship, his arm embracing me; and when the sun sank and no moon had yet risen to shed her milder radiance upon our bridal nights, how many a kiss he stole of me in the dark shadows

on deck, when the officer of the watch had his attention diverted elsewhere, or rather chose not to see! A piano and a harp were included in the luxurious fitting up of our saloon; and there were sounds of music over the waters many a night, when I lifted up my voice in joy to wake the echoes of the great deep in response to the mighty love that swelled with more than the vast ocean's strength in the bosom of a wife pure and true!

Nothing, I knew, could be added to our happiness; my only fear was, lest any change on land should take away from it. Oh, that the winds and seas could hold us back, that our voyage might lead to no haven, until we sank together into our everlasting rest! If it had pleased God that our ship should have gone down in mid-ocean, leaving no soul alive to tell the tale, I could have closed my eyes and clasped my darling to my heart, content to die with him: and yet how dear had life become now to both, for each other's sake! Far above all joy was the knowledge of

one another that grew in us day by day, when, joined in holy marriage, our lives flowed on so closely bound together that we were scarce ever divided for two hours' space at a time from the happy day that saw us one; the first brief week of our union taught us more than all the years before, since first we met and loved. My hero seemed greater to me in his noble mastery over self than the world could ever understand, renowned though he were as the modern personification of all that was chivalrous and good in the knights of the grand old time. 'The Bayard of India' was his title among the friends who knew him best, yet none so well as I. His word was enough to convince me that his brother-officer's wife could never have been to him in shame and dishonor what I was now by the holiest bond on earth: nor had he yet deemed of womanhood so highly until now that he had met all tenderness and truth combined in one, his virgin bride, pure and innocent, he said, as the babe that knows not sin. One evil woman had not corrupted

him to think evil of the rest, and how unlike the folly of that bygone delusion was his great love for me, tender and forbearing past the power of man!

Calm and deep as the peace of the blessed, our happiness, that seemed perfect, still increased from day to day, from week to week, until the vision of white cliffs broke upon our dream, before I had ceased to tremble at the dear caress, or been taught to repeat the beloved name of husband as a familiar word, common upon my lips—so shy was my Eastern nature. That evening we told one another, he, that his happiness was beyond all he had ever felt or conceived of in this world; I, that our union was my first knowledge of the deep draught of earth's joy: and together we asked of our Father that he would prolong for many years the lives he had so richly blessed.

Next morning we set foot on English land, and my days of greatness began. Alas! love asks not for such; heaven does not give every gift to any one creature at

the self-same time. I was a high lady now; my little neck rose tall above the world I had battled with so desperately, now my foes were made my footstool by the husband of my love. How sweet such revenge is to woman they only know who, like me, have turned defeat into that triumph, dearer than all others to the female breast, to win the lover for her lord upon whom her heart was set already, even while all the world declared her unworthy of her high choice! Honor and renown, had come to me without care and painful toil; my toils for art were condescensions now. Whenever I chose to stoop and gather the laurel wreaths, it was mine to add another thrill of pride to my joy; all the labors of my life were crowned as my husband's loving triumph in his young wife's fame.

London life was at its full tide when we reached England, and I, Psyche-like, was fain to display the conquest I had won before that same world which had mocked at my early struggles. In my own house

I could now assemble the fashion and celebrity of the day, to hear my last musical production, crude, and half evolved out of the chaos of my mind, far too disturbed for months past to think out a true work of art. The extremes of emotion, whether joy or pain, are the highest teachers of the sublime, but their lessons for the time being absorb all the faculties that receive them, and it is not until sober meditation has mellowed their fruit that the rich treasures can be gathered into the garner of enduring fame. Still, so young as I was, my impatience would not stay for another season, and within the very month of my return a composition of mine was to see the light in the spacious drawing-rooms of our town mansion.

'All the world and his wife' met royalty, diplomacy, the dignities of Church and State, the fine flower of fashion, and the *élite* of genius and intelligence, upon one broad ground, within those painted chambers. Arthur and I possessed between us every title to the world's homage, every

fascination to attract its envy. I knew and loved to taste the sweet sense of being hated where I had been pitied, courted by those who had slighted me, feared, rather than despised. May my sin be forgiven me, who was but a woman, with a woman's pride!

My cantata was a musical, not dramatic, transcription of the touching story of Undine, interspersed, however, with songs by the chief personages of the fable, to vary the descriptive music. The best talent in London was at my command, to interpret my composition, which, nevertheless, in the instrumental part, fell short of my own expectation, while it seemed to content the brilliant audience. Signor Stradella, who led the symphony describing the rising of the waters and beating of the storm against the fisherman's windows, bent towards me during the applause which followed with a whispered protest: 'This contents your world, but it does not content me, nor should it content you. I am sorry if you suffer yourself to be misled by

praise; you are capable of better than you have yet done. Take time, time! that is the first condition of work that is truly great.'

I knew it, and could not recover from the qualm of self-reproach, while three of the first singers of the day were carrying through my half-finished labor with the glamour and fascination of the human voice. One song alone had I reserved as my own part in the concert—the appeal of Undine forsaken to her still loving, though inconstant lord. Here I knew the thrill of passion must strike true upon every heart where a sympathetic chord could yield to the magic touch, and vibrate with a like emotion.

I did strike true, too true; I forgot that one was there drinking in every quivering of my voice, not as an artist's, but as the love-notes of the heart that was only his. One verse was over. Oh, the murmurs of admiring wonder! the triumph of success! —all I had desired on earth I possessed in that moment. Oh God! forgive me!

I sang again, the second verse. Almost overcome by my own emotion, I was reaching the end of my task, when a loud cry of pain interrupted my long sustained trill of passionate entreaty. All eyes were turned from me in a moment, and a crowd divided me from Arthur—I knew it was he—who had sunk down upon a couch in a far-off part of the room. Some minutes elapsed, though all made way for me to pass, before I knelt beside him.

All the help that friends could give me was to leave us at once. They did so at my bidding, as quickly and noiselessly as such a crowd could depart from such a scene. My fellow artists gave me their help to relieve the sufferer by change of position and draughts of air, until the highest medical skill could be made available. It was more than a quarter of an hour before the doctor came, and during all that time Arthur lay insensible, his head raised and supported by my breast. It was morning before he spoke to me or opened his eyes; the doctor watched

beside him, but would not suffer him to be removed. He urged me to let him take my place, both for the patient's sake and my own, lest I should faint beneath the dear burden in my arms; but there was no fear I would stir while he needed me; love gave me strength to wait and bear. When the sunlight pierced bright through the close-drawn curtains, I was rewarded by one look from those eyes I had thought were closed for ever.

One look only of tender love, one moment of wilder joy than heart can bear. The next, he glared around him, seeking and not finding in my face the fond wife he knew no longer. With a strange cold voice, he faintly asked:

'Who is this lady?'

'Leila, your own Leila, your darling, your wife!' With a heartrending cry, I threw myself into his arms, to be repulsed with the little strength left him. It was enough that he put me away from him; I knelt down, and wept aloud in my prayer to die. His voice smote me into silence.

'She never loved me; she only married me for my rank and name. She has that, and now she leaves me alone to die. Oh, Leila, Leila! you have forsaken me!'

'Arthur, my darling, I am here by your side; do not put me away again. I will stay with you—die with you.'

'No, no, not her! I will not have her. You are kind and good, I could bear you about me, but not her. She is a false, bad woman; she has betrayed my honor to another man. False, false! to her husband first, now to me. They told me she would do it, before I married her. Oh, fool!'

It was too horrible, though I saw he confused me with that other woman. I strove to answer him.

'You do not speak so of me? I am Leila, your wife. I could not be false—you know I could not; I have never loved man but you. She is dead who came between us: God forgive her all! *She* was false, not I. But do you not know she is dead?'

'Dead! Leila dead! I could not part with her, though I knew all the shame she brought upon me. Well, let her die! I shall be dead to-morrow!'

Again he relapsed into unconsciousness, and we bore him to his bed. The doctor warned me to keep still beside him, and not heed anything he might say. I must consider, he reminded me, that one effect of the maddening draught he had tasted was to breed a morbid hatred in the sufferer of those friends who were nearest and dearest before. If his strength rallied from the present attack, his reason might be restored, or that might have fled for ever; no human skill could foretell.

'He will not die?' I asked, in hoarse whispers choking in my throat.

'We cannot answer for him,' were the last terrible words that left me aghast with fear.

'Let him only live!' I prayed in my heart, subduing its own cry of anguish. Bereft of sense and reason, he lay before me like a stone image of the form dearer to me than all else upon earth, except the

soul still lingering within, eclipsed by dim unconsciousness. Who can paint my dread to see that life-fire burn lower and lower, until it should be quenched by the cold hand of death? or my horror, unacknowledged to myself, of seeing the faculties return, abused from their right sense, that noble mind utterly lost, the warm heart changed from tender love to cold rejection of me. This was the fear that possessed me now, yet I could not bring myself to consent that, if God so pleased, it would be happier for him to die. For days and nights I watched him, tasting no sleep with my eyes, until they met his once more filled with the old love. I was more than repaid for all my devotion by the first words he spoke from his heart, with the true sense of his mind in them. Oh! how he loved me! how blest I was! thrice blest in every joy that brings to mortal lips a foretaste of those pleasures whose fulness is at the right hand of our Father for evermore: but now I knew it was not for long!

I knew it could be but for a few brief months at the most; and then must come the bitter, bitter parting. Should I conceal his danger from him, or tell him what he so soon must know? I felt it was best there should be no secret between us, for it was more than I could bear, this great agony alone! I told him all the truth, one night that we were brought together very near to our God.

My darling was lying half conscious upon a sofa in my own room, a boudoir adorned for me under his own eyes, with all that love and taste could suggest, not very many weeks before. He was lying down in a blissful half sleep, I singing to him at my harp; my voice and all my talent were now dedicated to him alone; that voice, whose tones had wounded him so deeply, was tuned now to notes of tenderest balm. I knelt by his pillow and whispered, pausing in my song:

'Dearest, if we were called to-night to die—I could consent without a murmur, could not you?'

'Not now, we are so happy. I wish to live long years together yet—I have begun a new life with you—I feel as if I were twenty-five; I wish I were, to remain with you till we were both old!'

'Would it not be happier to die young? to reach that heavenly home where no change, nor trouble, nor any pain can follow us? To taste of eternal happiness?'

'My earthly home is so happy—to hear your voice singing, to look in your eyes—to hold you thus locked in my arms, to kiss like this—what more can immortality itself teach our souls to enjoy?'

'We shall know soon; our loving Father will not divide us in eternity.'

A low murmur came upon his lips, an echo of the words I had sung—Waller's old English ballad to my own music:

'What know we of the bliss above,
But that they sing and that they love?'

'Oh, my darling, my own darling, we shall soon be there!'

'I shall—I feel my time is coming; you

need not fear to speak to me, my sweetest. It is no more to me than going into a battle, but for you—do not talk of death: you are young, full of the ardor of genius. Love and sorrow have come only to make you great, not kill you in your prime. Why, that would make me a murderer. Oh no! I must die, and you must learn to live without me—perhaps love again and be happy when I am dead——'

'Oh no, no, no!' my cry interrupted him, and wildly weeping, I sank upon his breast; both fell asleep, and so we lay, till the early light shone in.

CHAPTER XIII.

PASSING THROUGH NATURE—

LOVE is strong as death, and has wrested many a victory from the last enemy. I won my darling back to such health and renewal of youth, that it seemed not to me only, but to all our friends, as if he might live and not die for years, respited through prayer, like the King of Judah in old times, or our own Prince, so hardly redeemed from the grave in answer to his people's prayer of faith and his young wife's cry of agony; worshipped by no truer loyalty, tended by no fonder love, than was my Arthur, England's darling hero, and my own dear husband.

How well he seemed! in mind and body

freed from care and pain, when we steamed in a brightly fitted yacht from Portsmouth to my old Cornish home, bound on a pleasant visit to my grandame, in whose eyes all my past aberrations were atoned by my splendid alliance. She had grown so old since last we met, that her memory was failing fast, and above all things she seemed to have forgotten death. That two young people, as she considered us, should turn their thoughts towards the great hereafter, looking beyond the present, seemed to her an inexplicable contradiction of nature: she was rather inclined to overlook our existence—mine, at least—and dwell upon the prospect of heirs being born to her own possessions and Arthur's title, a disposition not uncommon in the aged, to pass over the child they have seen, for the unborn descendants who may never be, eager, as it were, to grasp the most enduring hold upon this present world, when near to going out of it—to that long home whither man shall take nothing of his labor which he may carry

away in his hand. To my utter confusion of face, my 'interesting condition' was made the talk of every afternoon tea-table in the land of King Arthur's very questionable advent; if I was not 'as ladies wish to be who love their lords,' I was informed that I ought so to be; that as I must be some time, the present was the most convenient season. Therefore, to avoid animadversion, my grandame finally declared she was determined to tell everybody that I was actually so. I verily believe that, in the spirit of the Hebrew mothers, she would have looked upon my desolation in widowhood, or my own death, as a less misfortune than the failure of this expectation of hers.

Fate was in her mocking mood to unmake human designs and confound the hopes of mortals, that lovely autumn-tide, when I roamed arm-in-arm with my soul's beloved through the Western kingdom of England's heroic age, and I took my fill of delight in leading my Arthur through every legendary scene where his great

namesake's memory lives yet in the memory of men: Arthur the undying, who, as the old bards have sung, shall revive again from his deep sleep, and bear rule over the world, a monarch of men—even such a man as I looked upon, and owned my lord and master. Neither did I forget to sail over the waters with him, beneath the clear moonlight, brighter than common day, and bid him tenderly heed when we passed near the rock from which I fell in my anguish and despair of winning him ever for my love, and well nigh perished in the cold glittering waters for his sake. With what trembling alarm he heard me, mistaking for one moment my description of that hour's woe for some recent trouble come upon me: with what ecstasy of love he clasped me to his heart, closer and closer, until both were ready to die, if it could be so, of the joy of that dear embrace.

Again there loomed a change upon us: one afternoon, when I came to him for my sum of kisses, he turned away from me,

and when I pressed nearer to know the cause, his answer was cold and strange.

'Not now, Leila, I am tired of it all—there is no sincerity in so much caressing.'

Wounded to the heart, I went away from him, and wept out my woe and shame alone.

Next morning he failed to rise at my voice. I looked at him lying upon his bed, cast down by some sightless power. His grand stature struck me: he looked taller than when he stood upon the ground: what a long coffin—this hideous fancy was banished as it came. I rushed ino the town of Stormouth—we had stopped there for the night at an hotel—I summoned the doctor myself, for fear he might fail to come so quickly for any other messenger as he must for me; his house was but a few doors from our hotel, yet I passed a large shop window, set out with a costly show of elaborate mourning, such as the fashion of this world has chosen as the symbol of sorrow without hope, to make the entrance

into the next hideous, as it were to surround the everlasting rest of the Christian with every contradiction that can be devised by earthly pomp and pride. A horrible personal interest caught my eye for a moment only as I hurried past these mourning weeds. Ere many minutes I had returned, and stood by Arthur's bed, the doctor by my side. He was almost insensible, and made no reply to any question, only when my voice whispered close to his ear, asking, 'Are you in pain? Do you suffer?' his head moved a little, and a faint sound upon his lips seemed to tell me no—even this was something.

Such aid and alleviation as he could receive was suggested by the doctor, who sent me a kind nurse to be my help; but as long as my strength served I could not consent that another hand than mine should smooth my dear one's pillow, or bring the cordial to his lips that should prolong life to the utmost moment. Six nights and days I slept not. God bore me up until

my darling knew me no longer, and then I sank down beside him. I was lifted up, and carried into another room, and laid upon a bed to rest, but not until they gave me a promise to rouse me up the moment they saw any sign of returning consciousness in him.

I slept some hours in utter exhaustion; then my eyes opened, and the nurse stood beside me.

'He will know you now,' she whispered; 'come!'

Stranger as she was, I clasped her as a mother in my arms, and wept upon her breast.

'Be calm,' she said; 'he will know you are weeping.'

And so I crushed down my own heart's anguish to come to him.

'Leila,' he murmured low, and grasped my hand with the last desperate pressure; 'Leila! you are there, love?'

'I am, Arthur, my own!'

'I am a gone man——'

A great strength came to me from above to answer:

'You are going to our dear Lord Jesus! I can give you up to him.'

'How good you are, my darling——'

'Shall I say "Our Father?" Can you hear me pray?'

'Yes! yes!'

And I repeated that blessed prayer with a voice that grew firm and strong with the assurance of faith: so well we know it, that it comes to our lips and reaches our ears in such supreme moments as these. When I had done, he could not speak, but put up his hands and drew my face to his, then kissed me with passionate kisses. He had not kissed me from his heart thus for weeks before: in life there might have come division between us; in death we were one.

'If you trust in our dear Lord Jesus, and feel happy, lift up your hand——' He did so, and I spoke again: 'I shall follow you, Arthur, soon, very soon.'

I was becoming resigned to the divine decree, and almost desired to see my beloved in peace, rather than thus: I knew

the inevitable hour was close at hand. I will record no more of the pangs of dissolution; they told me he ceased to feel suffering—I could not be persuaded but that he endured unknown torments; but the end came, and I bowed my head. I felt that death was coming as an angel of mercy to chase away the dark fiend madness, hovering near the pillow of my beloved, to change his noble heart into a fire of hell fury, and I knew it was better he should die than live to hate me!

'I know that my Redeemer liveth;' and be my life days or months or years upon earth, I shall go to him who never will come again to me. Oh Arthur, my love, my only love, I shall follow soon, very soon!

CHAPTER XIV.

TO ETERNITY.

'Oh, what are thousand living loves
To those which cannot quit the dead?'—BYRON.

WE were together till the last breath that parted his lips before death closed them, but I could not follow when they laid my dead warrior to his everlasting rest. While his funeral honors were preparing, it seemed to all around me as though I were keeping my word to die and be buried with him. Myself thinking it would be so, I gave directions for my own interment, in my bridal dress, without a coffin, I desired to lie in earth beside him, could custom suffer this to be.

But it was not put to the test. I rallied

after many days and they told me I should have been a mother. Could this have been! to have borne a son of his! Alas! such great men seldom leave heirs to their name. Cæsar died childless, and so did the Theban hero, whose victories were to him as daughters to perpetuate his fame.

Even so best: let happier women have babes at their desire; mine should not be to strengthen the ties which bind as to earth, having suffered too much in my mortal days to long for the great joy of giving life.

My old grandmother mourns, in her eager longing for descendants, that I am desolate and childless, but so I must remain; I shall live and die a widow indeed —and as to love and marriage, never again! I have been too deeply blest in my first and last. Oh, Father! take me back again rather! Gather me to my kindred and my husband! Were I not a Christian, I should desire to follow the custom of my people, and pass through fire as a chaste wife to her lord. I can understand this

self-sacrifice, but not the consent of modesty to receive another man in his place. He who had the first kiss I ever gave man should have the last also. This is my Hindoo prejudice, no doubt, but the same feeling prevailed among our early mothers of Britain—Boadicea's heroic race, of whom England's greatness sprung.

Within one brief year, I had passed through life's richest joy, life's sharpest sorrow. It was very much, and yet I lived, not having suffered in vain. With the slow return of health and strength, the angel of music came to me as a comforter; my songs grew common on every lip among the great people of our Saxon race in England, and throughout the world.

This is an end worth living for, even to 'draw my breath in pain,' for some years yet, being still young, and they tell me, fair. When my work is done, my last sweet note uttered, I shall be taken away to sing to the golden harp above; there we shall meet again, and enter into the joy of the marriage feast, where husband and wife

shall re-knit the old bond of love, and be even as the angels in heaven—as we two were already upon earth ; but there the dark shadow of Death that came between us in Time shall never enter to part us more unto Eternity.

THE END.

REMINGTON AND CO., 133, NEW BOND STREET, W.